Miracles and Parables of Our Lord

Volume 3

THE PARABLES OF OUR LORD

Or, Life in Christ

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A Great Bargain

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it"—Matthew xiii. 45, 46.

A MERCHANTMAN endeavours to trade so as to make a profit. Whether he deals in pearls or in grain, he does not hope to obtain riches by labour. He leaves that to those who eat their bread in the sweat of their face. He tries to get his by the sweat of his brain. He is dependent not so much upon labour as upon knowledge, upon skill, upon the advantage which superior acquaintance with the article which he deals in gives to him. Now, this merchantman is, at the very commencement, in some measure a picture of the seeker after Christ. Christ and his salvation are not to be earned; they are not to be procured as the result of labour. But Christ is to be had by knowledge. What saith the Scripture? "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;" that is, through their knowing Christ they become justified. This is, indeed, another way of putting the system of salvation which is stated thus: "How shall I hear without a preacher?" The work begins with hearing the preacher; then it goes on to believing what they hear, and through believing they are saved. This is virtually knowledge—the knowledge communicated by God's messenger or by God's word—the knowledge heard, the knowledge believed. So men come to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal, for when a man knows Christ and understands him, so that he gives his heart to him, then is he saved. Inasmuch, then, as the merchantman seeks his advantage by superior knowledge, he becomes a type of the man who gets saved through obtaining the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

I shall not, however, enlarge upon this analogy, but proceed at once to speak of the merchantman in this parable; for here we have a fit emblem of many who lay hold on Christ and find him to be their all in all. Let us watch this merchantman while he is doing four things;

first, *seeking;* then, *finding;* then *selling* out; and, fourthly, *buying again.*

I. First, then, we shall WATCH HIM WHILE HE IS SEEKING. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls." It is different from the man we read of just now who, by accident, discovered a treasure while he was in the field. He was looking for something else, and came upon the treasure. That is the man whom God, in infinite sovereignty, saves, though he was heretofore indifferent and careless. This is a person of a nobler sort. He is of a higher grade of mind—of altogether different mental constitution. He is seeking goodly pearls—something good, not exactly seeking the one pearl of great price, for at first he does not know about it; but, still, he is seeking pearls, and he comes upon one pearl in consequence of his seeking.

Now, notice about him, as a seeker, that *he has his mind aroused and engaged.* He is thinking about something—thinking about pearls. His heart is occupied with his business. His energies are thrown into it. All his thoughts are in the direction of precious stones. Oh that we could wake men up to exercise the faculty of thinking, and then to direct, to regulate, and to control their thoughts! But thinking is an occupation that a great many persons altogether dislike. They are frivolous. We cannot get them to think about anything. Why is it that people are so passionately fond of reading novels, and so seldom read the true histories which are quite as interesting, and far more capable of affording pleasure and pastime? It is because the minds of men are frivolous. An idle tale—a silly story of a love-sick maid—will engross them by the hour together; but anything that is solid and worth the knowing seems to have small charm for their shallow brains. Many minds never get on the wing at all. Not a few men work so hard with their hands, and suffer such fatigue from bodily labour, that they are scarcely able to think much; while there are others who dissipate their time and consume their lives in idleness, till they are utterly disqualified for any vigorous thought. They are lazy and sluggish. They have the dry rot in their very souls. Their brains do not work. They seem to live in one everlasting lethargy and day-dream. Oh that men were wise, that they were thoughtful! Happy were the preacher who knew that he was addressing himself to a thoroughly intelligent, thoughtful congregation. We should expect, then, that the handfuls of good seed would drop into the furrows readily, and bring forth an abundant harvest. This merchantman's mind was aroused. He had something before him.

Equally evident is it that *he had a fixed definite object.* He had given himself to pearl-hunting, and pearl-hunting was to be the one object of his life. If you had met him, and said, "What are you seeking?" he would have answered in a moment, "I am seeking good pearls: have you any to sell me?" He would have been sure to have the answer ready to hand. But ask many a man whom you meet with, "Sir, what are you living for?" he would, perhaps, tell you what his trade or what his profession might be; but if you pressed him with the question, "What is the main object of life?" he would not like to say that he was living only to enjoy himself—seeking his own pleasure. He would

hardly like to say that he was living to grasp and grab and get a fortune. He would hardly know how to answer you. Many young men are in this condition: they have not a definite object. Now, you will not make a good captain if you do not know the port you are sailing for. You will make a poor life of it, young man, if you go out as an apprentice, and then afterwards out as a master, with no definite aim and end. Say to yourself, "I can only live for two things. I can live for God, or I can live for the devil; which now am I going to do?" Get your mind well fixed and firmly resolved as to which it shall be. I will put it to you as boldly and baldly as even Elijah did when he said, "If Baal be God, serve him; and if Jehovah be God, serve him." If the world, if the flesh, if the devil be worth serving, go follow out the career of a sensualist and say so. Let yourself know what you are at: but if God be worth serving, and your soul worth the saving, go in for that; but do not sneak through this world really seeking yourself, and yet not having the courage to say to yourself, "Self, you are living for yourself." Do have a definite and distinct object or else your vital energies will be wasted and your most industrious days will be recklessly squandered.

This merchantman, in the next place, had *an object which was not at all common-place.* Other people might go in for bricks and stones, or for grain, or for timber. He went in for pearls. He was a merchantman seeking pearls, and those the best he could pick up. He did not go in for common sea pearls, or pearls such as you may get in a Scotch river, but he went in for goodly pearls. He took a high aim, as far as that line of action was concerned. He went into a fine business. I would to God that many who have not found Christ nevertheless had sufficient of common-sense, sprinkled over with grace, to say, "I will go in for something good. My life shall not be a mean one"—

> "Lives of great men all remind us
> We may make our lives sublime."

It augers well for a young man when he has such an aspiration as this within him, "My life, too, shall be sublime. I will not seek mean or menial objects, I will not cultivate any depraved or grovelling tastes. I will seek something that I can commend to my own conscience—something that will bear reflection when I come to die—something that will carry the sterling mark when I have to value it in another world." O young merchantman, if thou art about to start in business, I recommend thee this business of seeking goodly pearls. Seek truth, seek honour, seek temperance, seek peace, seek love, seek that which will make thee good and true and right. I will tell thee anon where thou mayest find these, but for the present it may suffice me to inculcate a laudable ambition for everything that is honest and of good repute, and an eager desire with thy heart for that which thy conscience commends.

He went thus, to seek pearls, and *he sought them with diligence.* The merchantman was seeking goodly pearls. He did not open a shop, and say, "Pearls bought here if anybody likes to bring them;" but he went forth in quest of them. How far he travelled I do not know; but the oriental trader frequently goes immense distances. You may meet a

Nijni-Novgorod, in the south of Russia, with traders who have been all round the globe seeking what they want—men who do not always travel by railway, but who will walk any distance to obtain the very article on which they have set their minds, and in which they deal. Distance seems with them to be no object. Ah, and when a man has got a noble object before him, and says, "Before I die, I will accomplish something that shall be right and true and beneficial to my fellow men," he will face hardships that would baffle his fellows. I pray God that he may have the perseverance to carry that out, and that he may say, "Is there anything right to be learned: I will learn it, let it cost me what it may of care and toil, of headaches and heartaches, of buying experience and burning the midnight oil. If there is anything to be done that is good and true, I will do it at any hazard, for I am seeking goodly pearls."

And as the man was seeking, so he was *using discrimination at the same time.* When we are very diligent and full of desire we are in imminent danger of being easily deceived; but this man seeking goodly pearls was not like a lady unacquainted with the nature of pearls, but he was a merchantman who knew a pearl when he saw it. He knew the character of pearls and the value of pearls; he could tell which were cloudy, and which had a soft radiance, and which were of the first water. Indeed, he could tell a genuine pearl from an imitation one. He was a merchantman seeking goodly pearls. Yes, dear friend, and I pray God that if he put into the heart of any brother here to live for the right and for the true, he would give you great discrimination, for there are many shams in the world, and you may readily grasp that which appears to be substantial goodness, and it may turn out to be a shadow. Seek not pearls alone, but seek goodly pearls. Go in for the good; yea, cast your soul about to find the best.

Evidently this merchant *went into the business with comparatively moderate expectations.* He was seeking pearls. They must be of a tolerable size, and pure. He evidently expected to buy a good many of them. It was what he was seeking, seeking goodly "pearls" (in the plural). He had not reckoned that he should be fortunate enough to light upon one huge pearl that should be worth an emperor's ransom. That he had not looked for, though he did feel a desire that way. If anybody had said, "Would you like to find a big pearl?" he would have said, "That I would, infinitely better than to find a number of little ones." He hardly hoped for it, and therefore he did not seek it; but, still, he was ready enough to have it if it came in his way. And so, my dear friends, I am speaking of a class of persons—and I hope there may be representatives of them here—who want everything they can get that is good and true. You want to be temperate in all things; you want to have an unsullied character. I recollect that was my own desire, when first I thought of the life that lay beyond me. Before I knew the Lord I used to think, "O that I might be kept from dishonesty, that I might be preserved from falsehood, that I might be kept from a malicious spirit, that I might be right-hearted and true." Those were the pearls that I wanted. I did not know just then that I could find something that would include all these minor pearls and a good deal more. Still, it is well when such a

desire as that is in the heart especially of any young man. I wish it were in the heart of the old, if up till now they have never found the pearl of great price.

Thus have I shown you the man while he is seeking. I wonder whether he has come in here to-night, and is sitting amongst this assembly. Perhaps it is not a man at all, but a woman, a merchant woman. They can do trading well. Lydia, that seller of purple, was, no doubt, an admirable tradeswoman, and in the divine trade of which we are now speaking there is no difference. Well, you do not know the Lord yet, dear friends, but you do want to seek everything that is excellent. So far so good.

II. Let us go a stage farther, then, and look at this man's FINDING. He was buying pearls everywhere. Where he went he asked people if they had any pearls. He went down back streets, into the slums of big cities, and found out the Jews in those old days, living in the dirtiest corners of the city. He wanted to know whether they had any pearls. It was pearls of a morning, pearls at mid-day, pearls at night. If under his window at night anybody had cried, "Pearls!" he would have been downstairs in a trice to get them. He was hard after pearls; and so it came to pass that he lit upon a pearl that he never hoped to see. It was more than he expected. Ah, I pray God that some here, whose hearts are honestly seeking after that which is right, may find Christ, who has in him more of the spirit of temperance, uprightness, truth, philanthropy than will be found anywhere else. Oh, that they might find him who is the truth, and whose doctrine is perfect holiness and everlasting life. It will be more than they ever expected to find; but when they do find it, how glad they will be.

Certainly this man was in the way of finding a fine pearl if anybody was. He was seeking *goodly pearls*, not *the one* pearl; but he was in the pearl line, and so he was likely to discover the best pearl if anybody discovered it. "Being in the way, the Lord met with him," says one of old. Oh, if thou hast desires after that which is right and true and good, I trust that the Lord Jesus will manifest himself to you, and that you will say, "This is the very thing I sought for; I have longed and pined after it, and here it is."

This find was to this merchantman *a remarkable one.* He did not find goodly pearls: he found what was much better, one pearl; and to him that one pearl contained all the little pearls that he had aforetime been seeking after. Tell it, and let all men know it, that all that is good beneath the moon—all that is true, all that is right, all that is loving, all that is philanthropic, all that is of good report, commendable before God and praiseworthy among men, is to be found in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will be given to us, and wrought in us when we submit ourselves to him, and make him our all in all. He who is a Christian, if he be perfectly a Christian, has all good things in one. If there be aught that is to be praised and extolled by philosopher or sage, you shall find it in the example of the Master, and he will give us grace to exhibit it in ourselves.

So this man *found all in one.* What the value of that pearl was I do not know. The estimate of its value is not given. We only know that he thought it worth all that he had; and he went away and

sold all that he had that he might buy it. And he evidently thought it worth all the other pearls he had ever been seeking for, because if he spent his all upon that one pearl it would be clear that he must have abandoned henceforth the searching after smaller pearls, since he had no capital left. But he thought the one pearl of more account than all other pearls, and worth more than all that he had. Yes; I warrant you that he thought it worth a great deal more than all that he possessed. He would not have sold all that he had in stock to buy it if he had not the notion that it was worth ten times the price then, and that when he had paid it all he should have made his fortune, and should be rich beyond a miser's dream, for that is how traders in such things are sure to fetch their bargains. Well, when a man finds Christ I cannot tell you how much he values him, but this I know, that all the world besides seems nothing to a Christian when he has once found his Lord and Master. "Oh what a Christ have I!" saith he. But he cannot tell how dear—how inconceivably precious—the Christ of God is to his soul.

Concerning this find we must mark next that the man having found it, was *resolved that he would have it.* Having found the pearl of great price, he did not question whether he should buy it or not. If he had not gone out honestly to seek pearls he would have demurred at the price, but being intent upon pearl finding, he no sooner found this than he said, "I must have that. I can let the little pearls go if you like, but I must have that." And it is a grand thing when the Lord brings the human mind to this. "I see that in Christ there is everything I want—pardon for my sin, cleansing for my nature, grace to maintain my character and to make me perfectly fit for heaven. There is all in Christ that I want, and I must have him. I *must* have him. It comes to this—at any price—whatever it may cost me, I must and I will have him."

Now, although the parable does not say it in so many words, it is perfectly clear that the person with whom he was dealing was willing to sell. When he had found one pearl of great price he bought it, which he could not have done if the other had not been ready to sell it. Albeit the Lord in his mercy does not sell his grace, but gives it freely, the manner in which he disposes of it is here described under the figure of selling. If you want Christ, you may have him, if you are willing to come to the terms which God lays down. Of this I shall have to speak presently. If you desire this pearl of great price, there is no reason in the world why that pearl should not be yours to-night. If now you have found him, who is "the chiefest among ten thousand" and "altogether lovely," and you value him so that you cannot be happy without him, he will become at once your portion. If, having heard of Christ, your desire is toward him as all your soul can need, and you are ready to say, "I will not leave this house of prayer till Christ is mine," there is no obstacle to your possessing this priceless boon. Yea, God, even the Father, is willing that you should have his only begotten Son to be your pearl henceforth and for evermore.

III. Having thus described the seeker, and described the finder, we must go on to describe him SELLING OUT. He sold out all that he had. It had taken him a long time to get it together, and I

have no doubt he had much pleasure in the accumulation, but now he has great pleasure in selling. "Buy my farm," he says to one man. "Come buy it." "I don't know that I want to buy farms," says the other. "It is nought: it is nought." "Nevertheless, let us come to terms. I want money, and I must have money." And away went the furniture down in the house, one article after another. They must all go, clear them all out. There was a rapid sale. He must have money. They must go; everything must go for that pearl. Though he did not tell anybody his motive, that pearl was on his brain and on his heart, and all must go. He is more glad to get rid of his possessions than ever he was to obtain them. Away they shall go at the best price they will fetch, but go they must, for he must have the pearl. Well now, Jesus Christ is to be had, but there is a great deal that a man must give up if he is ever to call Christ his own.

"What, then," says one, "what am I to give up?" Well, there must be a selling off to-night of a whole mass of *old prejudices*. Sometimes when the truth as it is in Jesus comes to a man's mind he repels it, because it is so different from what he has learnt ever since he was a child; and the notion is that you had better follow the religion of your parents. If you had been a Hottentot, you would have worshipped a fetish. If you had been born in Hindustan, you must have worshipped Juggernaut, according to that theory. But it is a great mercy when a man says, "Now, I understand that Jesus the Son of God has died in the room and place and stead of sinners that believe in him, and I am simply to believe in him and I shall be saved. On my believing I shall receive a new nature and be born again by the Holy Spirit, and henceforth I shall become the disciple and the servant of Christ. Now," says the man, "I will do it. It is contrary to what I have always been told. I have been led to think that it was my good works which would save me. I have heard that the grace was in the sacraments, but at length I perceive that God teaches in his word that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, and I will have it. I will sell my prejudices off. Away they shall go."

Next to that you must sell off *your righteousness*. It will not fetch much, but I daresay you think it is a fine thing. Hitherto you have been very good, and your own esteem of yourself is that as touching the commandments—"all these have I kept from my youth up." And what with a good deal of church going, or attendance at the meeting house, and a few extra prayers on a Christmas-day and on Good Friday, and just a little dose of sacraments, you feel yourself in tolerably good case. Now, friend, that old moth-eaten righteousness of yours that you are so proud of you must sell off and get rid of it, for no man can be saved by the righteousness of Christ while he puts any trust in his own. Sell it all off, every rag of it. And suppose nobody will buy it, at any rate you must part with it. Assuredly it is not worth putting amongst the filthiest of rags, for it is worse than they are.

And everything else that you have heretofore thought fit to boast of —come, you must get rid of it. You know so much. Well, you had better sell off what you know, for except a man become as a little child he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. You are somebody, you fancy

you are not cast in a common mould, for you have a great strength of will, and can force your own way to heaven. You will have to get rid of that little conceit, for that strength of yours will be your weakness. It is only when we are weak in ourselves that we can ever be strong in Christ. Are you contented so to do? Will you sell off all the old prejudices and all the old righteousnesses? Going, gone! Will you let them go, or have you got a reserve price? Let them go, for they are dross and dung, and the sooner they are gone the better, for then you can buy the pearl, but not till then.

Ay, and there are some men that will have to give up a good deal of what they call pleasure, *sinful pleasure*. No pleasure which is honest, which is really beneficial to us, need ever be denied to us.

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less."

It makes them vastly more. But any pleasure that savours of sin is to be done away with. Come, can you sell all that off? That mixing in loose company, anything approaching to lewdness, anything that has to do with the gratification of the vile passions of the flesh—come, for Christ's sake, can you give it up? Well, if you cannot, of course you cannot have the pearl. If you must have the world you cannot have Christ; if you can find pleasure in the haunts of sin, you are of your father the devil, and his works you do. But come out from it; give it all up; cast it behind you. These things must be sold off if we are to have the pearl.

And, then, sometimes, in some cases, men have to give up a good deal of the honours and the satisfaction of life that arise from the esteem of their fellow-creatures. Has it come to this, "If I become a Christian they will ridicule me." Well now, can you not put up with a little obloquy for Christ? "But if I am an earnest Christian then I shall have to encounter all sorts of slander." Be it so, and can you not give up the applause of men for the sake of Christ? Come and let the dogs tear your character to shreds so long as you are right before him, and your motive is pure. "Ay, but I know what it is. I shall get the cold shoulder in society if I become a thoroughly earnest Christian. There is Lady So-and-so, for whom I have very great respect, whose good opinion I would not forfeit on any account, and she will not recognise me any more." Very well, can you put the whole lot of it into the scale and say, "I sell it all off; let it all go, that I may have the pearl." That man is not worthy of Christ who would be ashamed to stand in the pillory with him, or go with him to prison and to death. We must so love him that we count reproach for his sake to be honour, even as Moses counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

"Well, you have taken enough surely." Yes, but this pearl hunter sold all that he had, and you have got a little left. You have got some prospects. If you become a Christian your old uncle will cut you out of his will. You know very well that if you shall go to hear the gospel at such and such a place you are very likely to be turned out of your situation. "But we *must* live," says somebody. This is not at all clear to my mind. I do know that we must die, but as to "must living" I do not feel quite so certain about it. Infinitely better to die than ever

to do a dishonourable thing. If Jesus Christ be our Master, we must be content to let the fairest prospect go, and all things that seem to tell for our success in this life must be secondary in our account. We must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Ay, and sometimes love that has been longed for must go for Christ's sake. Company that has been delightful must be forsaken for Christ's sake, and if all this be done, yet still it is not enough. He that has Christ must give to Christ himself and all that he has. I should doubt whether I were a follower of Christ if I had not in my very soul given up to him all that I am and all that I have, to be for ever his. He has bought us with a price, and it is not surely meet for us to give him one arm, and one eye, and one foot, and half a heart. He that is a true Christian is a Christian through and through. Whatever he possesses of talent, whatever of substance he owns, he looks upon nothing as being his own, but as all belonging to his Master, and he is prepared to use all for his Master's glory, and to part with all if so it were needful for the maintenance of his Master's kingdom. The merchantman sold all that he had.

I think I see you draw back. "This—this is too hard a line." Very well, if you do not want to buy the pearl, you see—that is to say, if you do not want to make your fortune—for that buying of the pearl was the making of the man's fortune—if you do not think the pearl is worth it, pray do not have it. It is not possible to estimate the intrinsic value, the real worth of Christ. We do not cast pearls before swine. If you do not want him there are plenty who do. He need not come begging of you that you will be his customer. God forbid you should refuse, but if you do not want him, then say so. Only do say it, and definitely and distinctly say it, "I will have nothing to do with him."

But this man went and sold all that he had. I tell you he was glad to sell it. He counted that the man who bought his farm was doing him a favour. "Take it," he said, "there, I will let you have it under price if you will only let me have the money. I so much want to get money." No, but he did not dare tell him so much for fear he should go and raise the price, but in his heart, "I do so much want to get that pearl that I really would be obliged to anybody who will take of me that stock off hand." So if you really want Christ, instead of needing him to urge you to dispose of these poor effects which I have described, you will be eager to be rid of them that Christ may be yours. May the Spirit of God work in you such a high resolve.

IV. Now, the last thing is THE BUYING. He had sold all that he had, and then he pays the shekels over—pays them over that he may have the pearl, and he gets the pearl. It was a considerate purchase—a deliberate bargain. He did not see the pearl and then in a hurry go and sell his goods and guess at the value of it. No, but he had looked at it, for he was a seeker of pearls. He knew a pearl when he saw it, though I dare say he did not tell the seller all that he had seen in it. He said to himself, "That is a wonderful pearl. If I can get the money—my little stock wont fetch above five hundred pounds—but if I can get it for that, I am a made man." And so he thought it over. It did not want much thinking over. Oh, if a soul did but know Christ, he would not think twice before

he would have him. If men were not such fools—if they had but light from heaven to see the value of my Lord and Master, instead of our standing here and having to beg and persuade and find out new words of commendation, methinks they would only say, "Tell us about him. We will have him. What does he ask of us? What can we do for him? What can we submit to so long as we may but make sure of him who forgives all sin, who gives immediate and perfect salvation to all who trust him? So long as we may have the Christ of whom it is written, 'He that believeth in him hath everlasting life,' we shall be content." It was a well considered purchase.

And it was an *immediate purchase.* He did not go home and say, "I shall think about this." No, but he knew that pearl and he said, "If I let that slip through my fingers I shall never see the like of it again. If anybody else gets that bargain, then I shall have lost the one opportunity of my life." And so he does but take time enough to go and sell his farm off, and the little land he had, and the little property he had. He was back quickly with his money, only afraid somebody might have slipped in between and offered another thousand or two more than he was able to raise, and that thus he might lose the pearl. So, dear friends, he that cometh to Christ aright may well deliberate about it, but the end of his deliberation ought to be very speedy. "If he is to be had, let me have him. Oh, if I can know my sins forgiven, let me know it. Oh, if by any means I can have peace with God—if I can become a child of God and an heir of heaven—if my eternal happiness can be secured, oh, let it be secured! How is it done? Come, tell me at once. I wish not to leave my seat till I have found that which you speak of." It was a deliberate bargain—an immediate bargain.

And then it was a *joyful one.* I am sure his eyes twinkled as he paid over his money. I should like to have a picture of his face, when at last he had got his pearl. Now, that which he had been all over the world for he had got, only something a great deal better. He had got his pearl, and I dare say he was ready to jump for joy to think that he had got ready with his money. Ah, when a soul gets Christ it is—

> "Happy day, happy day,
> For he has washed my sins away."

It is the beginning of delight to a soul when he can say, "Jesus is mine; I know he is. Grace has enabled me to lay hold upon him."

And, oh, what an *enriching purchase* it was which the man had made. When he had once got the pearl instead of his property he thought to himself, "Why, I have got a hundred times more property now than I had. Though I have given up that bit of land I can buy half a province now, if I like, with this pearl which I have obtained. So, brothers and sisters, if you have ever given up anything for Christ I am sure that the Lord Jesus Christ has made you very ample amends. Some years ago a person rather eccentrically advertised for persons who had been losers by obedience to the divine command—that if any one who had lost anything through love to Christ would apply to him he would make it up. The odd advertisement appeared for some months in one of our religious periodicals. But the oddest thing is that nobody ever answered it. I should have thought that somebody

would have tried and made out a case; but nobody did. They cannot make out such a case: they are no losers by Christ. "But," say some, "the martyrs were, were they not?" Well, they are up there, ask them. They will tell you as you look at them with their ruby crowns, all brilliant in the light of God, as they stand—

"Fairest of the sons light,
Midst the bright ones, doubly bright,"

that they counted it their honour that they should be permitted to lay down their lives for Jesus' sake. Oh, there is no losing when you deal with him. You will make five hundred per cent. over this exchange; be sure of that. No, it shall be a thousand per cent., for "No man," says he, "shall lose house and lands for my sake that shall not receive in this world a hundredfold, and in the world to come, life everlasting."

This was a *final purchase.* The merchantman, according to the parable, never went buying pearls anymore. "No," said he, "no: I have bought a pearl of great price, and now I will go out of the business." And when a man once finds Christ—ah, then he seeks nothing more. If Jesus Christ be mine, more than all in him I find. He does not want a secondary object. His desires all stay at home, and satisfy themselves with the fulness that is in Christ Jesus. He went out of the pearl hunting line, for he had found all the pearls he should ever want. And it was *a purchase he never regretted.* The parable does not say that he came back to the seller and said, "There, take your pearl, and let me have my house and lands again." No, it was done. The great transaction was done. He never wished to have it undone. With his pearl of immense worth he was a rich man, worthy to be the rival of princes, and he felt that it was enough. Oh, blessed are they who can say "It is enough," and can rejoice and bless and magnify the Lord.

"Now rest, my long-divided heart;
Fix'd on this blissful centre, rest:
With ashes who would grudge to part,
When call'd on angels' bread to feast?"

Let me, however, just put in one word of caveat. Take care, dear merchant brothers, that when you buy a pearl you buy a good one—that it is the pearl of great price, because I have known noble spirits whom I have admired and felt ready to weep over; men that have been heroic in the pursuit of that which seemed to them perfectly true, and have made a sacrifice of all that they have for it, and yet they have been deceived. They have grasped antichrist instead of Christ, and welcomed the lie of hell which came to them in the garb of the angel of light. Mind, mind that you get Christ and his truth as you find it revealed in Scripture, and revealed a second time in your own heart by the Holy Ghost, for whatever is short of Christ will prove a cheat and deceive you. Some years ago one of the largest pearls that was ever found passed into the hands of a Russian. It was a very large pearl indeed—as large as an egg, and of a pear shape. He purchased it, the party who had it being ignorant of its value. He was a man of substance, and he kept it, and prepared a house which, though mean on the exterior, was sumptuously furnished within; and he would take his guests into an inner chamber which when it was

unlocked contained a table of marble in the centre of which was a box which had to be unlocked with divers keys and the reading of an alphabet, and so forth, and at last he produced this pearl, and he was very chary of ever permitting it to depart from his hand, for it was of immense value. The Emperor of Russia bid an enormous price for it, and promised him honour and rank besides, but he would not part with it. It happened, however, that the possessor of this pearl was implicated—whether truthfully or not I cannot tell—in a conspiracy, and had to leave his home at St. Petersburg. He took with him nothing but his pearl, and came to Paris sufficiently rich in the possession of that pearl. On a certain day the Duke of Brunswick, who was his only rival in such matters, came with some others to see the pearl. The owner unlocked it with great care and much deliberation, and when he had opened it he was observed to turn suddenly pale. It seemed as if he had been stricken with death. Unhappy man! His pearl had suddenly become clouded, as pearls sometimes do. It had been taken with some disease which happens to pearls, if I may so express it. In a short time it would turn to powder; it had ceased to be of any value whatever, and he had come down from a millionaire to a pauper. Yet he had bought a good pearl notwithstanding. There is only one pearl that never can be clouded, and will last right on throughout eternity, and that is the Son of God, "who only hath immortality." If you get him, you have a hope divine which never can fail you; but if you get a hope in priests or a hope connected with sacramentarianism, or any other hope but that of which Christ is top and bottom, beginning and end, you may make what sacrifice you will, but your brightest prospects will end in bitterest disappointment. The Lord grant that none of us may ever be thus balked of our life-confidence; that no such blank bewilderment may ever fall on our spirits.

"Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that *seek* the Lord." The voice of Jesus is heard in this parable of the kingdom describing and directing the *seekers*. Such persons comprise no small fraction of an assembly like the present. It would indeed be strange if seekers were not always largely represented here, and that in every stage of anxious enquiry. I am sure some of you have seen the pearl you want sparkling before your eyes. I wonder how many of you have resolved to sell all you have to buy it. But who among you all have actually made the pearl your own, and rejoice in its possession? That such of you will go on your way rejoicing there is no doubt; but will you not return and give glory to God? Shall we not have the happiness of greeting you here in the fellowship of the kingdom of his grace? The Lord grant it may be so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Early and Late
or
Horae Gratiae

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. . . . And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place. . . . Again he went out, about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?"—Matthew xx. 1, 3, 5, 6.

WE have frequently observed that we do not think it right to neglect the connection of Scripture. We have no right to tear passages of Scripture from their context and make them to mean what they were not intended to teach; and therefore I have in the reading given you, according to my ability, what I think to be the immediate design of the present parable. It is a rebuke to those who fall into a legal spirit and begin calculating as to what their reward ought to be in a kingdom where the legal spirit is entirely out of place, since its reward is not of debt but of grace. I think I may now, without any violation of propriety, dwell upon one very distinct fact in connection with the parable. It is not right to violate the drift of the parable, but having already observed it and made it as clear as we can, we believe that we are now authorized to make use of one of the main circumstances mentioned in it.

This morning I intend to call your attention to the fact that the labourers were hired at different periods of the day, by which doubtless we are taught, that God sends his servants into his vineyard at different times and seasons; that some are called in early youth, and others are not led to enter into the service of the Master until declining years have brought them almost to the eventide of life.

I must, however, ask you to remember that *they were all called:* by the mention of which the Saviour would teach us that no man comes into the kingdom of heaven of himself. Without exception, every labourer for Jesus has been called in one sense or another, and he would not have come without being so called. They are all called. Were a man what he should be he would need no pressing and invitation to come to the gospel of Christ; but since human nature is perverted, and men put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness, man needs to be called by the outward word;

he needs to be invited, persuaded, and entreated; he needs, to use the strong expression of the apostle Paul, that as though God did beseech him by us we should pray him in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. Nay, further than this, although some men come to work in a legal spirit in the vineyard through this common call of the gospel, yet no man in spirit and in truth comes to Christ without a further call, namely, the effectual call of God's Holy Spirit. The general call is given by the minister, it is all that he can give. If the preacher attempts to give the particular call as some of my hyper-calvinistic brethren do, confining the gospel command to a certain character and trying to be themselves the discoverers of God's elect, and to make that particular which is always universal; if the preacher acts thus, and virtually endeavours to give the particular call, he makes a sorry mess of it, and usually fails altogether to preach the gospel of glad tidings to the sons of men. But when man is content to do what he can do, namely, preach the commandment "that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," and that "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent," then there comes with the general call to the chosen of God a particular and special call which none but the Holy Ghost can give, but which he gives so effectually that all who hear it become willing in the day of God's power, and turn with full purpose of heart unto the Lord. In what sense is it true that many are called but few chosen, if none are to be called by the preaching of the Word but those who are chosen? There are two callings, the one is general to all who hear of Jesus, and many who are thus called are not chosen; the other is personal and peculiar to the elect, "for whom he did predestinate them he also called." To return to our point; all in the vineyard are in some sense called. There is not a solitary exception to this rule in the entire Christian Church. The doctrine of free-will has not a single specimen to show to prove itself. There is not a sheep in all the flock that came back to the shepherd unsought; there is not a single piece of money which leaped again into the woman's purse, she swept the house to find it: nay, I will go further, and say there is not even a single prodigal son in the entire family who did ever say, "I will arise, and go unto my Father," till first the Father's grace, veiling itself in the afflicting providence of a mighty famine, had taught the prodigal the miserable results of sin, as he fed the swine, and fain would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, but could not do so.

I want you to notice another fact before I come to the subject now in hand, and that is, that *all those who are called are said to have been hired.* Of course in a parable no word is to be construed harshly; we are to give the meaning according to the drift; but still I think we may say that there is this likeness between hiring a servant and the engagement of a soul to Christ, that henceforth a man hired has no right to serve another, he serves the master who has hired him. When a soul is called by grace into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ, he cries, "O Lord, other lords have had dominion over me, but now thee only will I serve." He plucks off the yoke of sin, its pleasure, its custom, and he puts upon him that yoke of which the Master says it is easy, and he bears that burden which Jesus tells us is light. A hired servant must not work for another, he works for his master; and so a

man who is called by grace lives not for any sinister object or motive, but to his Master only. A hired servant, again, does not work on his own account, he is not his own master; and "ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." Henceforth, though he calls no man "Master" on earth, yet he remembers that one is his Master in heaven, to whom all his service is due. There is a compact between the hired man and his master, and there is a solemn compact of spirit between the true believer and his Lord. We have devoted ourselves to his service, we have given up all liberty of self-will, and henceforth our will is at the government of our Lord, and all our powers and passions are to be, we hope will be, through God's grace, obedient to him who has hired us into the vineyard. Now the word "hired" was used in order to bring in the idea of reward. It was used to suit Peter's view of the case; it was used in order that his legal question of "What shall we have therefore?" might be clearly brought out, and its folly shown in the light of that sovereign grace which does as it wills with his own. Yet for all that believers are hired in an evangelical sense, they do not serve God for nought, they shall not work without a reward. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." We shall have our reward for what we do for the Master, and though it be not wages in the sense of debt, yet verily I say unto you, there shall not be a single true-hearted worker for God who shall not receive of his Master most blessed wages of grace in the day when he comes to take account of his servants.

Now to the point, *the master calls these hired servants of his at different hours of the day;* and, in the second place, *distinguishing grace shines forth in each case,* and is illustrated and made more manifest in its varieties of glorious compassion and lovingkindness by the different hours at which the chosen ones are called.

I. ALL ARE NOT CALLED BY GRACE AT THE SAME TIME. Some, according to the parable, are called *early in the morning.* Thrice happy are these! The earliest period at which a child may be called by grace it would be difficult for us positively to define, because children are not all of the same age mentally when they are of the same age physically, and even in the matter of mental development we dare not limit the Holy One of Israel as to the chosen period of operation. As far as our observation goes, grace works upon some little ones at the very dawn of moral consciousness. There are, no doubt, precocious children, whose intellect and affections are very much developed, and very deeply sanctified even so early as two or three years of age. Such children usually are intended by the Master to be taken home at once. There are interesting biographies extant, which prove that holiness may bloom and ripen in the youngest heart, and many anecdotes are treasured up in such collections as "Janeway's Token for Children," of children whom I might call infants with strict propriety, out of whose mouth God ordained praise, and did, through them, still the enemy and the avenger. Little prattlers, whose tongues it would have been supposed could only have talked of toys, have been able to speak with an apparent profundity of knowledge of spiritual, and especially of heavenly things. It is certain that some have wrought their day's work for the Master in their mother's arms; they have spoken of the

Saviour in tones which have melted a mother's heart and gone to a father's conscience, and then they have been taken home. "Whom the gods love die young," said the heathen, and doubtless it is no small privilege to be so soon admitted into glory. Only shown on earth, and then snatched away to heaven, too precious to be left below. Precious child, how dear wert thou to the good God who sent thee here and then took thee home! Fair rose bud! yet in the perfection of thy young beauty taken to be worn by the Saviour on his bosom, how can we mourn thy translation to the skies?

"No bitter tears for thee be shed,
Blossom of being seen and gone!
With flowers alone we strew thy bed,
O blest departed one!
Whose all of life, a rosy ray,
Blush'd into dawn and pass'd away."

"Early in the morning," would also include those who have passed the first hour of the day, but who have not yet wasted the second opening hour. I mean those hopeful lads and girls who perhaps would rather I should call them youths;—those who have reached their teens, have overleaped infancy and childhood, and are growing up in the heyday and vigour of youth. Youngsters still more at home in the playground than in the work-field, fitter, as Satan tells them, to be sporting in the market-place than busy in the vineyard; such as these, to the praise of divine love, are often hired by the householder. It is worth while to warn some of our brethren who seem to be exceedingly dubious of boyish and girlish piety,—to warn them against indulging harsh and suspicious doubts. We have remarked, and I think those who have watched our membership carefully will have remarked it too, that among all the slips and falls which have caused us sorrow, we have had but little sorrow from those who were added to us as boys or girls. There are those preaching the gospel this day with acceptance and power whom these hands baptized into Jesus Christ very early in their boyhood, and there are among us honoured servants of God who have served this Church well, who, while they were yet at school were joyful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. With our earliest gettings some of us got an understanding of the things of the kingdom; our Bible was our child's primer, our spelling-book, the guide of our youth and the joy of our earliest years. We thank God that there are Timothys still among us, and those not few and far between; and young Samuels, who, being brought as infants to the Lord's house, have from that day forth worn the linen ephod and served after their fashion as priests unto God, serving him with all their hearts. Happy those who are called early in the morning! they have peculiar reasons for blessing and praising God.

"Grace is a plant, where'er it grows,
Of pure and heavenly root;
But fairest in the youngest shows,
And yields the sweetest fruit."

Let us spend a minute in thinking of their happy case who are saved in boyhood. Early in the morning the dew still twinkles on the leaves, the maiden blush of dawn remains and reveals an opening

beauty, which is lost to those who rise not to see the birth of day. There is a beauty about early piety which is indescribably charming, and unutterably lovely in freshness and radiance. We remark in childhood an artless simplicity, a child-like confidence, which is seen nowhere else. There may be less of knowing but there is more of loving; there may be less of reasoning, but there is more of simply believing upon the authority of revelation; there may be less of deep-rootedness, but there is certainly more of perfume, beauty, and emerald verdure. If I must choose that part of the Christian life in which there is the most joy, next to the land Beulah, which I must set first and foremost by reason of its lying so near to Canaan, I think I would prefer that tract of Christian experience which lieth toward the sun-rising, which is sown with orient pearls of love, and cheered with the delicious music of the birds of hope.

Early in the morning, when we have just risen from slumber, work is easy; our occupation in the vineyard is a cheerful exercise rather than a toil such as those find it who bear the burden and heat of the day. The young Christian is not oppressed with the cares and troubles of the world as others are; he has nothing else to do but to serve his God. He is free from the embarrassments which surround so many of us, and prevent our doing good when we would consecrate ourselves wholly to it. The lad has nought to think of but his Lord. There are his books and his lessons, but he can be fervent of spirit in the midst of them. There are the companions of his childhood, but in guilelessness and simplicity he may be of service to them and to God through them. Give me, I say, if I would have an auspicious time to work for Jesus, give me the blessed morning hours, when my heart is bounding lightest and joy's pure sunbeams tremble on my path; when my glowing breast lacks no ardour, and my happy spirit wears no chain of care.

One would prefer early conversion because such persons have not learned to stand idle in the market-place. A fellow, you know, who has been for hours standing with his hands in his pocket, talking with drunken men and so on, is not worth much at the eleventh hour, nay even by the middle of the day it has become so natural to him to prop the walls, that he is not likely to take to work very readily. Begin early with your souls, break in the colts while they are young, and they are likely to take well to the collar. There are no workers like those who commenced work while they were yet children. What a promise of a long day there is for young believers; the sun has just risen, and he has to travel to his zenith and to descend again. There is ample room and verge enough though none to spare. If God in his providence permit it so to happen, that youngster yonder has twelve hours' work before him—what may he not accomplish? For a grand and glorious life early piety if not essential, is certainly a very great advantage. To give those first days to Jesus will spare us many sad regrets, prevent us acquiring many evil habits, and enable us to achieve good success through the Holy Spirit's blessing. It is well to begin to fly while yet the wings are strong, for if we live long in sin the wing may be broken and then they will flap wearily through the rest of our days, even when grace shall call us. Let it be the desire of parents here to have their children converted as children! And oh! may God cast that desire into the hearts of some of you young people that are here this morning that

before you reach one-and-twenty, before you are called men, you may be perfect men in Christ Jesus, that while you are yet children you may be children of God. May you as "newborn babes receive the sincere milk of the Word," and the Lord grant that you may "grow thereby." Happy, happy, happy souls, whom the Master thus by distinguishing grace brings "early in the morning!"

The householder went out again *at the third hour.* This may represent the period in which we have mounted above being children and youths and are entitled to be called men. Suppose we settle the first hour as extending over the earliest seven or eight years of age; then the second hour runs on from that to twenty-one or thereabouts; and then we have a good length of time between twenty and thirty and onwards to reckon as the third, and fourth, and fifth hours. There are some whom divine grace renews at the third hour. This is late! one-and-twenty is grievously late, when you consider how much of early joy is now impossible, how much of sinful habit has now been acquired, how many opportunities for usefulness are now gone past recall. A quarter of the day has flown away for ever when we reach the third hour. It is the best quarter of the day, too, that has gone past recall. The first meal of the day is over,—that blessed breaking of the fast with Christ is no more possible. A very precious meal is that, when the Saviour gives us the morning portion, the manna which melteth when the sun is up. Blessed is the child's feeding upon Jesus: truly I remember when I was awakened like Elias from under the juniper tree, and fed on such dainty fare that to this day the flavour abideth with me. The man of one-and-twenty has lost that first meal, breakfast is all over; Christ will say to him as he will to some others, "Come and dine," and that is precious; but the daintiest meal is over, the first early enjoyment, the first early rapture can never be known.

I have no doubt there are many here who think that to be converted at one-and-twenty is very soon; but why one-and-twenty years given to Satan? Why a fourth of man's existence devoted to evil? Besides, it may not be a fourth, it may be one half, nay, in how many cases it is the whole of life. The sun goes down ere it is yet noon, and the idler in the market-place has no hope of ever being a worker in the vineyard. Death who comes when God wills, and gives us no notice, may cut down the flower before it has fully opened. "In the morning it is like grass that groweth up, in the evening it is cut down and withereth." It is late, it is sadly late! It is a sad thing to have lost those bright days in which the mind was least engaged, in which it was the most susceptible of forming godly habits. It is a sad thing to have learned so much of sin as one may have learned by one-and-twenty, a sad thing to have seen so much of iniquity, to have treasured up in one's memory so much of defilement. Twenty years with God; one might have been in such a time a good scholar in the kingdom; but twenty years in the world one begins to be like scarlet that has been lying in the dye till it is stained through and through. *It is late, but we thank God that it is not too late.* Nay, it is not too late even for the grandest of purposes. Not only is this period of life not too late for salvation, but it is not too late to do much for Jesus Christ. Some of us when we were one-and-twenty, had finished five years of Christian ministry, and had been the means of

bringing many souls to the cross of Christ; but if others are led by grace to begin then, why there is a good period still remaining if God in providence spares our lives. The young man is now in all his strength and vigour, his bones are full of marrow, and his heart is full of fire. He ought to have acquired a good degree of education, and be prepared to acquire more.

Now he is just in the time when he should work. His plans of life are not settled as yet; he is not married yet, probably; as yet there are no children about him to have been injured by his ill example; he has an opportunity of rearing up a household in the fear of God. He is commencing business, he has an opportunity of so conducting that business that there may never need to be a time when he shall have to tack about and steer another course. He may, if called by God's grace at one-and-twenty, begin an honourable career, in which there need not be an angle or a curve, but straight to the harbour's mouth he may steer and mark upon the sea of life one shining furrow which shall reach in a direct line from the present moment straight to the lights of heaven, which he shall reach with his sail full and a priceless cargo on board to the praise of the glory of divine grace. It is late, it is very late in some respects, but oh! it is not too late to serve the Master well, and to win a crown of great reward, the gift of love divine.

There is abundance of work to do for us who are in this third, fourth, and fifth hour of the day. In fact, I suppose the Church must look to us for its most active work. After this period and the next, a man frequently becomes rather a recipient from the Church than a donor to it in the matter of activity. Its fresh blood, its energy, its warmth of heart, its ready action, must to a great extent come from the young men who are converted. Oh, you of one-and-twenty, I would to God that you were all born from heaven! You maidens, in your early beauty may the Master in his infinite mercy bring you in! Oh, could you know the sweetness of his love, you would not need persuading! Could you understand the joy of true religion, you would not want entreating! There is more hallowed mirth enjoyed in secret with the Lord Jesus Christ, than in all the merriment the world can yield. One ounce of Christ's love is better than a ton of the world's flatteries. The world offers bubbles with fair hues, bright to look upon, but vanishing at a breath; but Christ gives real treasure, enduring as eternity. The world's gold is all base money; it glitters, but it is not precious. There may be less glitter about the things of God, but there is a "solid joy and lasting pleasure," which "none but Zion's children know." May the Master come this morning to your hearts, and by my simple words may he call you at the third hour of the day into the vineyard.

The Master's grace was not exhausted, and therefore *he went out at the sixth hour.* We find him going into the market at high noon. Half the day was over. Who is going to employ a man, and give him a whole day's wages when twelve o'clock has come? He will not do too much if you hire him at six, what will he do if you engage him at twelve? Half a day's work! that is a poor thing to seek or to offer. The Master, however, seeks and accepts it. He promises, "Whatsoever is right, I will give you;" and there are some found who at the sixth hour enter into the vineyard and, being saved by grace, begin their work

for Jesus. This may represent the period of life in which man is supposed to be in his prime—when he is past forty and onward. *This is sadly late, very sadly late.* Sadly late in a great many respects, not only because there is so little time left, but because so very much of energy, and zeal, and force, which should have been given to God, has been wasted; and has to some extent been used to fight against God. Forty years of hardness of heart! That is a long time for divine patience. Forty years of sin! That is a long season for conscience to mourn over. "Forty years long was I grieved with this generation," said God. In the wilderness they hardened their hearts all that time; and he sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. What a blessing for you of forty and unconverted, that he has not sworn so terrible an oath concerning you, that still his longsuffering lingers, still his patience bears with you, still does he say to you, "Go, work, my son—go work this day in my vineyard." It is sadly late, because it has become so more than natural to you to walk in the way of sin. You will have so much to contend with in future, as the result of the past. Putting the ship of the soul about is not such easy work as turning a vessel by her helm; only a divine hand can steer a soul upon the tack of grace. You will need much grace to conquer those corruptions which have had forty years to take root in. You have a tenant in your house who is in possession, and you will find that possession to be nine points of the law; it will be a hard ejectment for you to effect, so hard indeed, that only a "stronger than he" can cast him out. To your dying day the recollection of evil things which you heard during these forty years of unregeneracy will stick by you; you will hear the echoes of an old song just when you are trying to pray, and some deed which you regret and mourn over, will come to check you just when you are about to say, "Abba Father," with an unstammering tongue. It is late, it is very, very late, this sixth hour, *but it is not too late.* It is not too late for some of the richest enjoyments; you can yet dine with Jesus; he can yet manifest himself unto you, as he doth not unto the world; you can have yet much time to serve him in. It is not too late yet to be distinguished among his servants. Take John Newton's life; he was called in the middle of the day, but John Newton left his mark in God's vineyard, a mark that will never be forgotten. I suppose Paul could not have been much less than of that age when he was called by sovereign grace; nay, the most of the apostles were probably very little short of this age when mercy met with them; still they did a glorious day's work. If saved by grace in middle life, my brother, you must work harder, you must let the time past suffice you to have wrought the will of the flesh, and now you must redeem the time, because the days are evil. Why, a man converted at forty should go double quick march to heaven, there should not be a moment lost now. Work the engine at high pressure, and give two strokes for every one that might be given by younger men and younger minds. Seek in the divine strength to do twice as much in the time, since you have only half the time to do a life's work in. Crowns for Christ, I know you wish to win them; then be up and doing, beloved. You are saved by grace, and by grace alone. You pant to honour Christ, because of his free love to you; cannot you endeavour to honour him as much in the remnant which remains

as others do in the whole length of their life? You may by zeal, and prudence, and discretion, and perfect consecration, yet serve the Master well.

The householder *went out at the ninth hour*, at three o'clock in the afternoon. Nobody thinks of engaging day-labourers at three o'clock in the afternoon. A day's work to be done from three till six! It shows you that this gospel hiring is nothing like a legal hiring; it must be all of grace, or a man would not think of doing such a thing. Well now, three o'clock in the afternoon, that is from sixty to seventy. The prime of life has gone. *It is late, it is sadly late, very sadly late.* It is late because all the powers of the man are weak now. His memory begins to fail; he thinks his judgment better than ever it was, but probably that is only his own opinion. Most of the faculties lose their edge in old age. He has acquired experience, but still there is no fool like an old fool; and a man who has not been taught by divine grace learns very little of any value in the school of providence. Sixty thousand years would not make a man wise if grace did not teach him. Now think of it, is it not late? Here is the man: if he be converted now, what is there left of him? He is just a candle end. He may give a little light, but it is almost like a snuff burning in the socket. All those sixty years, seventy years, have been spent, where? Cover it all up. Let us go backward as Noah's sons did, and cover it all up; and oh, may almighty grace cover it too! The fact is terribly appalling—sixty, seventy years spent in the service of Satan! Oh what good the man might have done! Had he but served his God as he served the world, what good he might have done! He has made a fortune, has he! How rich he might have been in faith by this time. He has built a house! Yes, but how he might have helped to build the Church. The man has been playing at card-houses; he has been like boys by the sea-shore building castles of sand, which must all come down, and must come down very soon too, for I hear the surges of the dread tide of death, it is rolling in even now. Those teeth which have fallen out, those pains and rheumatics, and so on, all show that this is not his rest. The tabernacle is beginning to crumble about the man, and the warning is loud which reminds him that he must soon be gone, and leave his wealth and his house; and so if this be all, in the end it will turn out that he has done nothing; he has piled up shadows, heaped together thick clay, and that is all he has done; when he might, if he had believed in Jesus, have done so much for God and for the souls of men. What evil habits he has acquired! What can you ever make of this man? If he be saved, it will be so as by fire. He is called, and he shall enter heaven, but oh! how little can he do for the Master, and what strong corruptions will he have to wrestle with, and what an inward conflict even till he gets to heaven! It is late, it is very late, but oh! blessed be God! *it is not too late.* We have had within these walls persons who have long passed the prime of their days, who have come forward and said, "We will cast in our lot with you because the Lord is with you." We have heard their joyous story of how the old man has become a babe, and how he that was hoary with years has been born again into the kingdom of Christ. It is not too late. Did the devil say so? The gate is

shutting; I can hear it grating on the hinges, but it is not shut! The sun is going down, but he is not lost beneath the horizon yet; and if the Master calls thee, only run thou the faster because it is so; and when thou art saved, serve him with all thy might and main, because thou hast so little time to glorify him here on earth, and short space in which to show thy sense of deep indebtedness to his surpassing love.

The day is nearly over, *it has come to the eleventh hour*, five o'clock! The men have been looking at their watches to see whether it will not soon be six; they are longing to hear the clock strike; they hope the day's work will soon close. See; the Master goes out into the market-place among those hulking fellows who are still loitering there, and he pitches upon some and asks them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go and work! and whatsoever is right I will give you." At the eleventh hour they come in—half-ashamed to come I will be bound,—hardly liking the others to see them; ashamed to begin work so late. Still they did steal in somewhere; and there were generous labourers who looked over the tops of the vines, and said to them, "Glad to see you, friends! glad to see you, however late." There were a few, I dare say, among the labourers, at least there are if this be the vineyard, who would even stop their work and begin to sing and praise God to think that their fellows had been brought in at the eleventh hour. Now the eleventh hour must be looked upon as any period of life which is past threescore years and ten; how late it may extend I cannot tell. There is an authentic instance of a man converted to God at the age of a hundred and four, during the last Irish revival, who walked some distance to make a confession of his faith in Jesus Christ; and I recollect a case of one converted in America by a sermon which he had heard, I think, eighty-one years previously. He was fifteen when he heard Mr. Flavell at the end of a discourse, instead of pronouncing the blessing, say, "I cannot bless you. How can I bless those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ? 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha;'" and eighty-one years or more afterwards that solemn sentence came to the man's recollection when he was living in America, and God blessed it to his conversion. There have been some to whom the eleventh hour has been the very hour of death; some, I say, how many or how few is not for me to know. There is one instance we know in Scripture, it was the dying thief. There is but one; God however, in his abundant mercy can do as he wills to the praise of the glory of his grace, and at the eleventh hour he can call his chosen. It is very late, it is very very, very late, it is sorrowfully late, *it is dolefully late, but it is not too late*, and if the Master call thee, come—though an hundred years of sin should make thy feet heavy to thee, so that thy steps are painfully limping. If he call thee it is late but not too late, and therefore come. Have you ever thought of how the thief worked for his Lord? It was not a fine place for working, hanging on a cross dying, just at the eleventh hour; but he did a deal of work in the few minutes. Observe what he did. First he confessed Christ—he acknowledged him to be Lord, confessed him before men. In the second place he justified Christ—"This man has done nothing amiss." In the next place he worshipped the Lord Jesus, calling him "Lord." He even began to preach, for he rebuked his fellow sinner; he told him that he should not

re rile one who was so unrighteously condemned. He offered a petition which has become a very model of prayer—"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." At any rate I wish I could say of myself what I can say of the thief, *he did all he could;* I cannot say that of myself, I am afraid I cannot say it of any of you. I do not know anything the thief could have done on the cross which he did not do. As soon as ever he was called, he seems to have worked in the vineyard to the utmost extent of his ability; and so let me say to you, if you should be called at the eleventh hour, my dear hearer, though thou be well stricken in years and aged, yet for Jesus Christ's sake out of great love for all the great things which he hath done for thee, go thy way and praise him with all thy might.

II. My time has gone, and I wanted to have shown that DISTINGUISHING GRACE SHONE RESPLENDENTLY IN EVERY INSTANCE. Those called in the early morning have delightful reason for admiring sovereign grace, for they are spared the ills and sins of life. I must content myself, however, by repeating concerning them the lines of Ralph Erskine.

> "In heavenly choirs a question rose,
> That stirred up strife will never close;
> What rank of all the ransomed race,
> Owes highest praise to sovereign grace.
>
> Babes thither caught from womb and breast,
> Claimed right to sing above the rest;
> Because they found the happy shore,
> They never saw nor sought before."

What distinguishing grace is that which called us when we were young! Herein is electing love. "When Ephraim was a child then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." Some of us in time and in eternity will have to utter a special song of thankfulness to the love which took us in our days of folly and simplicity, and conducted us into the family of God. It was not because we were better disposed children than others, or because there was naturally anything good about us; we were wilful, heady, and high-minded, proud, wayward, and disobedient as other children are, and yet mercy separated us from the rest, and we shall never cease to adore its sovereignty.

Look at the grace which calls the man at the age of twenty, when the passions are hot, when there is strong temptation to plunge into the vices and the so-called pleasures of life. To be delivered from the charms of sin, when the world's cheek is ruddy, when it wears its best attire, and to be taught to prefer the reproach of Christ to all the riches of Egypt, this is mighty grace for which God shall have our sweetest song.

To be called of the Lord at forty, in the prime of life. This is a wonderful instance of divine power, for worldliness is hard to overcome, and worldliness is the sin of middle age. With a family about you, with much business, with the world eating into you as doth a canker, it is a wonder that God should in his mercy have visited you then, and made you a regenerate soul. You are a miracle of grace, and you will have to feel it and to praise God for it in time and eternity.

Sixty again. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his

spots? If so, then ye who are accustomed to do evil may learn to do well." And yet you have learned, you have had a blessed schoolmaster who sweetly taught you, and you have learned to do well. Though your vessel had begun to rot in the waters of the Black Sea of sin, you have got a new owner, and you will run up a new flag, and you will sail round the Cape of Good Hope to the Islands of the Blessed, in the Land of the Hereafter.

But what shall I say of you that are called when you are aged? Ah you will have to love much, for you have had much forgiven. I do not know that you may be in thankfulness a whit behind those of us who are called in our early youth; we have much to bless God for, and so have you. We are at one extreme and you are at the other; we would love much because we have been spared much sinning, and you must love much because you have been delivered from much sinning. Not to go through the fire is a theme for song; but to traverse the flame and not be burned, to walk the furnace and to be delivered from its vehement fire, oh! how should you find words with which to express your gratitude! Called early or called late, called at midday or called at early noon, let us together, since we have been called by grace alone, ascribe it all to the Lord Jesus, and moved by the mighty constraints of his love, let us work with body, soul, and spirit—work for him till we can work no longer, and then praise him in the rest of glory.

I pray you, brethren, suffer no idleness to creep over you. If you have sought to extend the Redeemer's kingdom, do it more. Give more, talk more of Christ, pray more, labour more! I often receive the kind advice, "Do less." I cannot do less. Do less! Why, better rot altogether than live the inglorious life of doing less than our utmost for God. We shall none of us, I am afraid, kill ourselves with working too hard for Jesus. It were such a blessed act of suicide that if there be a sin that is venial, it would certainly be that. I am not afraid that you are likely to perpetrate such an enormity. Work for the Master! Labour for the Master! We must spend and be spent, and wear ourselves out for him! Make no reserve for the flesh to fulfil the lusts of it! And oh, how happy shall we be, if we may be privileged to finish the work, and hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." May the Lord bless you for Christ's sake. Amen.

The First Last, and the Last First

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first."—Matthew xix. 30.
"So the last shall be first, and the first last "—Matthew xx. 16.

We must be saved if we would serve the Lord. We cannot serve God in an unsaved condition. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." It is vain for them to attempt service while they are still at enmity against God. The Lord wants not enemies to wait upon him, nor slaves to grace his throne. We must be saved first; and salvation is all of grace. "By grace are ye saved through faith." After we are saved, and as the result of salvation, we serve. Saved—we serve. He that is saved becomes a child of God, and then he renders a child-like service in his Father's house. That service is also all of grace. He serves not under the law of the old commandment, "This do, and thou shalt live;" for he is not under the law, but under grace. Therefore, sin shall not have dominion over him, but grace shall have dominion over him; and he shall seek to serve the Lord and please him all the days of his life. When we are saved, we must never forget that we are saved that we may serve; made free from sin, that we may become servants to God. David says, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds." Because our bonds are loosed, we are under new bonds, bonds of love, which bind us to the service of the Most High.

Now, when we come thus to be servants, we must not forget that we are saved men and women; for if we begin to fancy that, while we serve, we are working to win life by our merits, we shall get upon legal ground; and a child of God on legal ground is going back, he is departing from his true standing before God. Still remember, "Ye are not under the law, but under grace." But if you begin to forget your indebtedness to your Saviour, not only for eternal life, but for everything you are, and have, and do, you will be like the Galatians, who began in the Spirit, but sought to be made perfect by the flesh.

You will be like the young man, whose question we have just read: "What lack I yet?" You will be like Peter, who puts in a sort of claim for reward: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" You will be like the men who had worked in the vineyard from early morning, and who murmured because the penny was given to those who had only worked for a single hour. Christ will not have his servants under bondage to a legal spirit. Wherever he spies it out, he strikes it on the head; for both the service and the reward are all of grace. The service itself is given us of God, and God rewards the service which he himself has given. We might almost speak of this as an eccentricity of grace. God gives us good works, and then rewards us for the works which he himself has given. So all is of grace from first to last, and must never be viewed with a legal eye. Into this subject I want on this occasion to conduct you.

I dare say that you have heard sermons from this text, but probably not preached from it in its connection. I like to take the text as it stands, and get from it a bit of exposition for my own heart, which I may pass on to you; for, remember, although the text away from its connection may be true, yet it is not the truth which God there intended to teach us, and it becomes us to look about us to see what comes before the text, and what comes after, in order that we may catch the exact meaning of the Holy Ghost in giving the words.

I. I shall begin by dwelling upon this remark: IN THE SERVICE OF OUR LORD FREE GRACE IS MANIFESTED. It may not strike you as being upon the surface of the text, but it lies on the very surface of the whole connection: in the service of our Lord free grace is manifested. Think that over.

It must be so, in the first place, because, although it is rewarded, *all our service is already due to God.* Under the law we are bound to love the Lord with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength. There can be nothing beyond that. All that we can do we are already bound to do, under the law. Works of supererogation must be impossible, since the law comprehends all holiness, and condemns every form of sin. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have done no more than it was our duty to do. Hence, brethren, if there be a service to which we are called, and for which a reward is promised, it must be a service of grace. It cannot be any other. Under the gospel, the same thing is true; all that we can do is already due. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." There is no faculty, there is no capacity, there is no possibility of your nature which is not redeemed, and which does not belong to Christ by virtue of the ransom price which he has paid for it. You will gladly and gratefully own the obligation to do all that lieth in you, for him who loved you, and bought you with his precious blood.

> "Could my zeal no respite know,
> Could my tears for ever flow;"

surely they are all due to my Lord already in repentance and gratitude. All the zeal of missionaries, all the patience of martyrs, all the faith

of confessors, all the holiness of godly men, is Christ's by right, and therefore there can be no reward for them, seeing that they are his due already. If there be a service for which a reward is given to us, it is a service granted to us of grace, that we may receive grace thereby.

But, next, there is this reflection—*all our service is in itself unacceptable.* When all comes to all, it is still, in and of itself, a thing so mean and poor, so imperfect and defiled, that it could not claim any reward. Job was made to feel this in the day of his humiliation. He said "If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life." If it were possible for us to stand before God in any merit of our own, we feel so certain that we have come short of the glory of God, and that in many things we have offended, that we would tear off our righteousness from us, and throw it away as filthy rags, even the best of it. "I count all things but loss," saith Paul, "that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ; the righteousness which is of God by faith." If then we are so conscious of our failures, and shortcomings, and transgressions, and if we have to cry for mercy even on our holy things, and to confess sin in them, how can we suppose that any reward that may be given can be otherwise than of grace, seeing that the whole service itself must be of grace?

Think again. *The ability to serve God is the gift of God's grace.* I refer not only to mental ability; but to the capacity which men of substance have to help the cause of God by their generous gifts. It is God who gives the power to get wealth, as it is he who gives the brain to think, and the mouth to speak. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" If any here present are serving God with gifts and graces, I am sure that they must own that these were given to them. They did not win them themselves. Or, if some of them be acquirements, yet the power to acquire was given them of him from whom cometh every good gift and every perfect gift. Thus the ability to serve God is the gift of grace.

Beloved, *the call to serve God in any special way is also of grace.* If we are called to the ministry, remember how Paul puts it: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." If our kings put upon their coins "*Dei gratiâ*"—kings, by the grace of God—well, well, let them say so; but we can put it on our lives. "Sunday-school teachers, by the grace of God." "Street-preachers, by the grace of God." "Students in the College, by the grace of God." "Preachers of the gospel, by the grace of God." It is God who calls us to our several sacred employments. Our ordination, if it be an ordination at all, is from that great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, who went up into a mountain, and called unto him whom he would, and made them to be his first messengers. Before he left them, he gave them that great commission which is still binding upon all his followers, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is of grace that we are put into any sphere of service;

and what a grace it is to be permitted to do anything for him! His shoes' latchets we are not worthy to unloose; his shoes we are not worthy to bear. Though it be a menial's work, it is a monarch's work to do anything for Christ. Blessed be his name, if he will let me be anywhere in his service, though it were but as a scullion in the kitchen! The kitchen is in the palace, and Christ's kitchen-maids are maids of honour. He that serveth God, reigneth. To serve him on earth is to be glorified. To serve him in heaven will be a part of our endless glory. Surely this, then, is by grace.

Still further, *every opportunity of serving God is a gift of grace.* I am sure that when I have been shut out from the pulpit by sickness, I have thought it a great grace from God to be permitted to creep into the pulpit once more. When one's hand has been unable to hold a pen, we count it a grace to be able to write again some loving words that may be blessed to men. I think that it is God's grace that puts in your way people to whom you may speak privately. It is God's grace that brings those children to the Sunday-school to you, that you may teach them. If we were wide awake, we should see, all day long, opportunities of usefulness, and we should be saying, "Blessed be God who puts me by providence where I can be of some little service to him, and bring forth some fruit to his praise!" It is all of grace; these providential openings, and the spirit and the power to avail ourselves of them, come as gifts from God.

Another thing I know: when you have the call to a work, and the opportunity, still *it is a gift of graee to be in a right state of mind to do your Lord's service.* Do you never feel sluggish and dull? Would you not *always* be so if his Spirit did not quicken you? Are you not sometimes frost-bitten, so that your soul seems like a great iceberg? Would the waters ever flow unless the Spirit came with melting power? Do you not thank God, dear brother, that you have had gracious occasions in which the Lord has made you like Naphtali, "a hind let loose"? When you have given forth goodly words, from whom has come the unction? whence the power? You have spoken: ah, that is a poor thing! But God has spoken through you: ah, that is a grand thing! Is not that wholly the work of grace? Every tear of sympathy that the preacher sheds when he is wooing men to Christ, every heart-throb and all the anguish of his soul when he would fain compel them to come in, the whole bearing and carriage of a grace-taught minister or teacher—all this is of grace, and unto God must be the glory of it. It is not under law that we are working; for law provides no strength, no tone, no savour. It is grace that makes us work; for it gives us the strength with which to work. "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." Thou givest him strength proportioned to his need, and the guidance necessary because of the difficulties of his task. Here is grace. Is it not so?

You will be sure to join with me in the next point without a single demur: *success in holy service is wholly of the Lord.* If we were so wicked as to attribute to ourselves the sowing, and to ourselves the watering, apart from grace, yet we dare not attribute to ourselves the increase.

"I have planted," said Paul; "Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Would a single persuasion of ours prevail with man's hard heart if the Holy Spirit did not convince him of sin, and make him repent? Would the preaching of the gospel in our poor way ever enlighten a single eye if Jesus Christ were not seen in his own light? Could we comfort the broken-hearted, could we proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, if the Spirit of God were not upon us? Why, if we did make the proclamation, would it not fall flat to the ground apart from the work of God, who doeth all things through us and by us? We are labourers together with him. We lift our hand, and God lifts his. We speak, and he speaks. We would fain lay hold of men's hearts, and he does lay hold upon them. We would weep them to Christ, and he brings them weeping to Christ, and saves them to eternal life. Blessed be his name! After many years of prophesying in his name, dare any of us say that we have made the dry bones to live? After having long given the invitation, do we say that we have persuaded one to come to the wedding-feast apart from the Lord's divine working? Do we take any of the glory of a saved soul to ourselves? It were treason; it were blasphemy. We dare not commit such a sin. Our work, if it succeeds at all, if it is worth calling good work, is all of grace.

And if, my dear friends, any of you are called to suffer for Christ's sake, *the honour of suffering is a special gift.* If you have been reviled, if you have lost position, if you have suffered those moderate martyrdoms which are possible in a free country like this, then "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." But take no credit to yourself. You are elevated to the peerage of suffering: it is your King who brought you there. You have his gracious permission to pass through great tribulation: that were nothing to you, if you had not washed your robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. You owe your patience, your courage, your steadfastness, all to the Spirit of God. You had long since been carried away by the fear of man, which bringeth a snare; you had long since been a traitor to the truth, and to your Lord, if he had left you. It is your duty to be faithful. When you are faithful, it is not in yourself that you are so. He works all our works in us, and he must have the praise of them. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Work it out to the very full. Be thorough with it. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." God will reward you; but your steadfastness, your diligence, your patience, all these are the work of the grace of God, and you know it. If you, indeed, possess them, you ascribe them all to him.

Now, then, we have established this, I think, beyond all contradiction, among spiritual men—that in the service of the Lord free grace is magnified.

II. So we take another step, and we say, as our second head, HENCE THE LORD HAS HIS OWN WAY OF MEASURING WHAT WE DO. You

see that in the case of these persons who had toiled in the vineyard; their master measured their work after his own fashion. He did not go by the regular pay-way of so much an hour; but, inasmuch as it was all of grace, this great householder made the reward to be after his own measure, a penny for one hour and a penny for twelve hours. He made the last equal to the first. So shall it be: "The last shall be first, and the first last." This is because we are dealing here, not with a legal paymaster, but with a God of grace, who measures our service, which itself is all of grace, by his own measurement, and not by ours.

He will reward every worker, but not as we judge. He will do no man any injustice, even in the omnipotence of his grace. He will be able to say to every worker, "Friend, I do thee no wrong." He will do no wrong to any one of his servants, whoever they may be; rest sure of that; but still he will reply, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" and he will reward his workers in his own royal yet gracious way.

So, then, *he will not reward us according to the time spent, or surface covered.* Some may be Christians for thirty or forty years, and may never be among the first. It is not the length of your service, good as that is, that will be God's gain. There may be some who shall come to Christ and go home to heaven in a single year, and yet shall bring great honour to their Master. It is not the length of time in which you are engaged in the Lord's service. Neither is it the space that is apparently covered. Some seem to do a great deal, skimming over a wide surface; but it is not so that the Master measures: neither by the hour, nor yet by the acre. That might be a legal way of measurement, but his gracious way of measurement is not so.

And *he will not measure out the reward according to our ability*, whether it be mental ability, ability of substance, or ability of opportunity; for some of us might come in for a large share, and others might come in for a very little, if this were the rule. But this is not the way the Master measures. If to one man he gives the gift of speech, to another the great gift of diving deeply into the meaning of his word, and to another experience, and so on, yet the reward to the persons holding these various gifts will not be in proportion to the gifts they have, but after quite another rule.

The reward will not be according to the judgment of men. A brother has served God in his way, and his brethren think much of him, and appoint him to an office. He is a deacon, or an elder, or, peradventure, he becomes a pastor. It is a high reward to be allowed thus to increase our opportunities of usefulness; but we shall not at last be rewarded according to the height of office. That is not the standard in this kingdom where Christ rules.

Above all, *no man shall be measured by his own judgment;* else I know some friends who would have a very grand reward. They are free from sin; they are perfect, they say: their Master knows, if they do not, whether that is true or not. Another says, "I have done this, and I have done that." But it is not what you say that you have done, that will gauge your Master's reward to you. There are some that speak very loudly of what they have accomplished. I do not

think that their brethren, for the most part, think the more of them for thinking so much of themselves. I believe that those who have lower opinions of their own capacity and usefulness are much more honoured in the presence of the saints of God. No, our self-judgment, our tall talk, our loud profession, and so forth, will not be the measure with which we shall be rewarded; else those who said, "We have borne the burden and heat of the day," would have had twopence, at least, if not threepence, or, perhaps, even a shilling, in proportion to those poor creatures, whom the master made equal to them, though they had only come in at the eleventh hour.

Our reward will not be according to the impression made among men. We may have made our mark upon our age, and neighbourhood, and surroundings. Some men's names will go down to posterity; others have no fame at all. It will be found of some men that their lives are written and emblazoned everywhere. Others will live in the little circle of their family, but not beyond that narrow range. But God will not measure so. The godly housewife, with four or five children trained for God in her cottage, may be reckoned of God among the first; and the able speaker, in his pulpit, who has thousands hanging on his lips, may be reckoned of God among the last. God has his own ways of measuring up men's works.

But let me add that *we shall not be rewarded even according to our success.* To some men success is meted out in large measure; that success which really is not their own, but is the fruit of other men's labours. A man preaches the gospel with many tears for years, and sees little fruit. He dies: another man, of earnest spirit, follows him, and gathers in the old man's sheaves. The former man planted; the other man entered into his labours. To whom shall the reward be given? The success is not due to him who seems to have achieved it. You remember the old Romish legend, which contains a great truth. There was a brother who preached very mightily, and who had won many souls to Christ, and it was revealed to him one night, in a dream, that in heaven he would have no reward for all that he had done. He asked to whom the reward would go; and an angel told him that it would go to an old man who used to sit on the pulpit stairs, and pray for him. Well, it may be so, though it is more likely that both would share their Master's praise. We shall not be rewarded, however, simply according to our apparent success.

Neither shall we be put down as one of the last because of non-success. God intends that some men shall never succeed, according to the rule of success that appertains among men; for he sent even his servant Isaiah to go and make the people's hearts hard, and their ears dull of hearing; and he sent Jeremiah to weep over a nation to whom his tears brought no repentance and no reformation. He may send you, like Noah, to preach for one hundred and twenty years, and never get a soul beside your own family into the ark. But if you are faithful, that is well pleasing in his sight. Here lies the good pleasure of God. I do not suppose that it will happen that you are to do all the ploughing and all the sowing, and there should never be an armful of sheaves for you in all your life; though, if it should be thus, and you shall have been at the last found faithful to the commission that your God

has given to you, verily, I say unto you, you shall have your reward; but the reward is not measured out according to man's rule of success.

Let me tell you what I think is a rule with God. It is a many-branched kind of rule. Some men stand first because of their strong *desire*. Oh, they would have saved the people if they could; they would have persuaded men to be Christians if they could; they would have laid down their lives to do it. They preached their very hearts out in their desire for their hearers' salvation. Their souls ran over at their lips while they talked with men. God knows their desires, and he takes the will for the deed, and "so the last shall be first."

God also measures *proportions*. The brother never had more than one talent, but he did as much with it as some with ten; yet it did not seem to come to much in his eye. He was always mourning because he was so little. He thought that he was like one of those coral insects at the bottom of the sea, just making a little bit of coral which never came above the waves; but it was part of a great whole that would afterwards rise into a fairy island of the sea. Our Lord will measure, not according to what a man hath not, but according to what a man hath.

And here is one who has little to commend him except his *spirit*. He waits upon God. He is very gracious. He trembles at God's word. He speaks with his whole heart very reverently, very tenderly, desiring always to be silent if God would have him silent, and only to speak when God would move him to speak. His delight is to do the Lord's will, and nothing but the Lord's will, and he is quite content to be nothing. Indeed, he cries for that—

> "Oh, to be nothing, nothing,
> Only to lie at his feet!"

Now, God may put that man among the first; whereas the self-contained man, who does work for God sincerely, may, nevertheless, have to go into the back rank, and be among the last.

Here is one, again, who, whatever he does, does it with *thoroughness*. He does not attempt many things, but he does one thing. It is all that he can do, and he throws his whole soul into it, and works at it like some Eastern artist working at a cameo for a prince. All his life is put into that little bit of a thing; and, it may be, that our great King will count him first; while another who did much in a slovenly, slurring style, and was thought to have done a great deal, will have all his work rejected, for it is not up to the Prince's mark, and he will not adorn his palace therewith.

I think, dear friends, that God will measure our work very much by our *thought of him* in it. If we did it all *to* him; if we did it all *for* him; if he was always in our mind in the doing of it; and we did not think of our friends, nor of our own reputation, God would be more likely to honour us, for he will put those who think much of him among the first, and others among the last. "Them that honour me," saith the Lord, "I will honour."

And especially, again, if all that we do is baptized with *love*. Why, see that woman who brought her alabaster box, and broke it, and poured the precious ointment of spikenard upon Christ's head! She

is put among the first, and Christ makes honourable mention of her wherever the gospel is preached. Some that did much have to go among the last; for they had not such love as she had.

Some work for God with great *faith;* and the Lord loves to see us working in faith. To do a great deal of work with a great deal of unbelief, is to do very little after all; for if a prayer that is unbelieving does not prosper, preaching or teaching that is unbelieving is not likely to do so. Put faith into thy work, and, may be, thou wilt be among the first.

I am sure that God measures much of our work according to the *prayer* we expend over it. Oh, yes, it was a fine sermon! You could tell how the preacher had worked at it; you could see how he had polished up that phrase, and how he had cut that sentence into dice-pieces to make it tell; but you could also see that he had never prayed over it. A sermon that is prayed over is worth ten thousand that are merely prepared, or copied, or that spring out of a man's mind without being wrought by the Holy Spirit in his heart. Oh, to pray down the sermon, and then to pray up the sermon, and pray it all over, resting upon God alone!

God will often look upon our work in *giving*, not according to how much we give, but I think that the Lord's rule is to take notice of *how much we have left*. That woman who gave all her living, gave more than all the rich men gave, because she had nothing left. It was but two mites that make a farthing; but then it was all her living; and so she goes into the front rank. My lord has given a thousand pounds, and we are very much obliged to him. He must go into the back rank, for all that; for he has so much left.

And then, it may be, that they will take the first place *who did not get any reward* for what they did. Our Lord tells us that when we are making a feast we should call in the blind, and the halt, and the lame. Why? "For," he says, "they cannot recompense thee." He speaks of the Pharisees again, and says, "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." You will not be paid twice. If you have done something for Christ—for instance, defended the faith—and you are denounced for it, and traduced for it, very well, you have not had your pay for it. There remaineth the recompense for unrewarded services. It is a grand thing when, by the grace of God, you have something standing in God's book, not of law, but of grace. You helped a poor man, and he was not grateful. Oh, be so thankful that he was not grateful, because, if he had been grateful, you would have had your reward, may be! When those you relieve are very kind afterwards, and speak well of you, and do you some good service in return, it is very nice; of course it is. Well, but you are paid. But those who have done good and suffered for it; who, for the best thing that they did have had the worst return; who have rendered kindness, and have only received unkindness as the result; it may be that the Lord will say of them, "These were last, but they shall be first;" whereas many that stood first in men's esteem, and in the gratitude they received, will have to go last.

III. Now, my time almost fails me, but you must bear with me on my third head; for here is the practical part of free grace in our service.

Hence, WE HAVE INSTRUCTION AS TO OUR SPIRIT AS WORKERS. If the work is all of grace, and if God has a way of measuring up that work, which is not at all according to the law, but of his own grace; then there are two things to be observed. First, do not be proud; secondly, do not be discouraged.

Do not be proud, for many that are first shall be last. Suppose, my dear friend, that you really are first, and are doing a great deal for God, will you be proud? Why, *you are only a greater debtor.* You owe all the more to that grace, which has enabled you to be of some service in the kingdom of your Lord. Lie low at your Lord's feet, and be very humble.

Next, remember that though you may think that you are first, *you may, even now, be among the last.* Your assessment of your service may not be the divine assessment at all. You may think that you are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"; and, in God's repute, you may be "Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Your work may be like very big trusses of hay, and loads of straw, and stacks of stubble; and yet, when God comes to try it, it may be all burned down to a handful of ashes; whereas the friend, of whom you think so little, may only have built a small portion, but he has built it of gold, and silver, and precious stones.

Let us also recollect that, even if it is true that we are among the first, we may, if we get proud of it, *find ourselves among the last.* Oh, how some of God's greatest servants have been shrivelled up when they began to swell out with pride and vanity! God blessed them as long as they were feeble, and weak, and leaned upon his strength; but when they were strong, and relied on themselves, there came a dreadful failure.

There is one thing which is absolutely certain. *If you are among the first, you will reckon yourself to be among the last.* He that is best thinks himself worst. What a description Paul gives of himself in the seventh of Romans! "Oh," says one, "I heard a person say that Paul was not a converted man when he wrote that!" Let me tell you that he had been in the third heaven when he wrote that bit of deep experience. He had so much likeness to his Lord that he excelled every other man then living, except, perhaps, John; and if it had not been for his extraordinary holiness he would never have been able to pen those tremendous groanings wherein he says, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The man who thinks that he is holy has never seen the holy God. If he had—if he had ever beheld him, he would say with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The superlative perfection of the Lord God, and the absolutely perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ, are such that if a man has ever had communion with these, he shrinks into nothing in his own esteem. He that is really first is always the man who is willing to be accounted last. Paul, though he is not a whit behind any of the apostles, yet calls himself less than the least of all saints, and describes himself as having been the chief of sinners. Ah, beloved! a low idea of self is one of the labels with which God marks the best of his possessions; therefore, do not be proud.

In the next place, do not be discouraged. If you feel that you are last, *God's measure is not yours.* Though you may think that you are last, he may not think so at all. Though you say, "I am not worthy to be an apostle," yet he may think you worth putting into the apostleship. God's idea of your worthiness and your own may greatly differ; and his estimate is the true one.

Besides, suppose that you are last, yet "*He giveth more grace.*" Christ has come, not only that we may have life, but that we may have it "more abundantly." Do not be content with what you have. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." Covet still more the best graces. God is able to do for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Go in for great things. Hath not the Lord said, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it"? I spoke to a man of God this morning, and I told him how God had graciously enabled me to draw near to him in prayer, and of the glorious way he had granted my requests. My friend said, "Yes, and he has made your mouth bigger than it used to be." Is it not so? The faculty of believing prayer grows by being used. The more you ask, the more you may ask; and the more you have asked, the more you will ask. The capacity to receive is increased by receiving. God grant that it may be so with us if we are last!

Remember, too, that if you really are among the least useful, yet *a right spirit may compensate* for your poverty, and make your little service very precious. If you cannot get a wide sphere, do not want it. A young minister said to an old one, "Ah, sir! I preach only to about one hundred people. I wish that I could get where I could gather a thousand." His friend answered, "Young man, a hundred people are quite enough for you to be accountable for; and if you faithfully discharge your duty to their souls, you have quite enough to do." Wish for a larger sphere if you are capable of filling it; but remember that the best preparation for greater usefulness is to be faithful in your present position.

My last word to God's children is this: what does it matter, after all, whether we are first or whether we are last? Do not let us dwell too much upon it, for *we all share the honour given to each.* When we are converted, we become members of Christ's living body; and as we grow in grace, and get the true spirit that permeates that body, we shall say, when any member of it is honoured, "This is honour for us." If any brother shall be greatly honoured of God, I feel honoured in his honour. If God shall bless your brother, and make him ten times more useful than you are, then you see that he is blessing you—not only blessing him, but you. If my hand has something in it, my foot does not say, "Oh, I have not got it!" No, for if my hand has it, my foot has it; it belongs to the whole of my body. If my mouth alone eats, yet it does not eat for my mouth alone; but it eats for my brain, my hand, my backbone, for every part of me. So, when you get to feel your oneness with Christ, and your oneness with his people, your only thought will be, "Let God be glorified; let him be magnified. It does not matter whether I am first or last." You will stand up and say, "That brother, who was converted only a week or two ago, got his penny, and I am glad of it." Here is another, who has done very poor work; but you will thank God that he has got his penny.

He is one of the family. It all comes from the same hand, and it will all come home to the same house. We are something like men in a great shop, where there are different people serving. One young man has a counter where ladies come, and he serves them, and he takes a lot of money in the day; another counterman, at the back, sells goods that take a deal of trouble to dispose of, and upon which there is but a trifling profit. Does the master praise the men of the shop according to the quantity of money each takes? The one who is put in the back place, and sells poor goods, is just as diligent and just as worthy in his master's sight as the others. Suppose that they are all members of one family, when they meet at night, one will say, "I took so much." Another will say, "I took ten times as much as that;" but they are all glad, because it all goes into the firm; it is all a part of the same concern. Go then, dear brothers and sisters, and work away for Christ, and do not envy one another, but all be glad to be permitted, in this work of grace, to take any part or any portion for your Lord.

One thing more, and I have done. I have only been talking to God's people all this while, because you that are not saved cannot serve him. What a miserable position yours is! You are out of the pale of service. God will receive nothing of you till you come to Christ. The only way to bring a sacrifice is to bring it through the great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;" much less shall you be accepted as servants there. I beseech you, by the thought of the grace of which I have been speaking, to rest not until you can say that Christ has saved you, made you a partaker of his grace, and sent you forth into his royal service. The Lord bless you! Amen.

A Sermon to Open Neglecters and Nominal Followers of Religion

"But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second and said, likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye might believe him"—Matthew xxi. 28—32.

THE sight of this vast arena, and of this crowded assembly, reminds me of other spectacles which, in days happily long past, were seen in the amphitheatres of the old Roman Empire. Around, tier upon tier, were the assembled multitudes, with their cruel eyes and iron hearts; and in the centre stood a solitary, friendless man, waiting till the doors of the lion's den should be uplifted, that he might yield himself up a witness for Christ and a sacrifice to the popular fury. There would have been no difficulty then to have divided the precious from the vile in that audience. The most thoughtless wayfarer who should enter into the amphitheatre, would know at once who was the disciple of Christ and who were the enemies of the Crucified One. There stood the bravely-calm disciple, about to die, but all around, in those mighty tiers of the Colosseum, or of the amphitheatre of some provincial town, as the case might be, there sat matrons and nobles, princes and peasants, plebeians and patricians, senators and soldiers, all gazing downward with the same fierce, unpitying look; all boisterous for their heathen gods, and all vociferous in the joy with which they gazed upon the agonies of the disciple of the hated Galilean, butchered to make a Roman holiday. Another sight is before us to-day, with far more happy associations; but alas! it is a far more difficult task this day to separate the chaff from the wheat, the precious from the vile, than in the day when the apostle fought with beasts at Ephesus. Here, in this arena, I hope there are hundreds, if not thousands, who would be prepared to die for our Lord Jesus; and in yonder crowded seats, we may count by hundreds those who bear the name and accept the

gospel of the Man of Nazareth; and yet, I fear me, that both in these living hills on either side, and upon this vast floor, there are many enemies of the Son of God, who are forgetful of his righteous claims—who have cast from them those cords of love which should bind them to his throne, and have never submitted to the mighty love which showed itself in his cross and in his wounds. I cannot attempt the separation. You must grow together until the harvest. To divide you were a task which at this hour angels could not perform, but which one day they will easily accomplish, when at their Master's bidding, the harvest being come, they shall gather together first the tares in bundles to burn them, and afterwards the wheat into Jehovah's barn. I shall not attempt the division, but I shall ask each man to attempt it for himself in his own case. I say unto you, young men and maidens, old men and fathers, this day examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Let no man take it for granted that he is a Christian because he has helped to swell the numbers of a Christian assembly. Let no man judge his fellow, but let each man judge himself. To each one of you I say, with deepest earnestness, let a division be made by your conscience, and let your understandings separate between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not. Though no man clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side, shall go through the midst of you to set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations of this city, let conscience take the inkhorn and honestly make the mark, or leave the favoured sign unmade, and let each man question himself this morning, "Am I on the Lord's side? Am I for Christ, or for his enemies? Do I gather with him, or do I scatter abroad?" "Divide! divide!" they say in the House of Commons; let us say the same in this great congregation this day. Political divisions are but trifles compared with the all-important distinction which I would have you consider. Divide as you will be divided to the right and to the left in the great day when Christ shall judge the world in righteousness. Divide as you will be divided when the bliss of heaven, or the woes of hell, shall be your everlasting portion.

If the whole of us were thus divided into two camps, and we could say these have made a covenant with God by sacrifice, and those on the other hand are still enemies to God by wicked works, looking at the last class we might still feel it necessary by way of personal application to make a division among them; for although all unbelievers are alike unpardoned and unsaved, yet they are not alike in the circumstances of their case and the outward forms of their sins. Alike in being without Christ, they are still very varied in their mental and moral condition. I trust I was guided by the Spirit of God to my text this morning, for it is of such a character, that while it enables me to address the whole mass of the unconverted, it gives me a hopeful opportunity of getting at the conscience of each by dividing the great company of the unconverted into two distinct classes. O that for each tribe of unbelievers, there may be a blessing in store this day.

First, we shall speak to *those who are avowedly disobedient to God;* and, secondly, to those who are *deceptively submissive to him.*

I. First, we have a word for THOSE WHO ARE AVOWEDLY DISOBEDIENT TO GOD. There are many such here. God has said to you as he says

to all who hear the gospel, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard;" and you have replied, perhaps honestly, but certainly very boldly, very unkindly, very unjustly, "I will not." You have made no bones about it, but given a refusal point-blank to the claims of your Creator. You have spoken your mind right out, not only in words, but in a more forcible and unmistakable manner, for actions speak far more loudly than words. You have said, over and over again, by your actions, "I will not serve God, or believe in his Son Jesus." My dear friend, I am glad to see you here this morning, and trust that matters will change with you ere you leave this hall; but at present you have not yielded even an outward obedience to God, but in all ways have said, "I will not." *Practically* you have said, "I will not worship God, I will not attend a place of worship on the Sunday—it is a weariness intolerable to me. I shall not sing the praise of my Maker—I will not pretend to bless the God for whom I have no love. In public prayer I shall not join—I have no heart for it. I shall not make a pretence of repeating morning and nightly prayer in private—what is the good of it? I will not pray at all; I do not believe in its efficacy, and I will not be such a hypocrite as to follow a vain practice in which I have no belief whatever. As for what is called sin, I love it and will not give it up." You are proud of being called an honest man, for you own the claims of your fellow men upon you, but you scorn to be thought religious, for you do not admit the rights of your Maker. To the righteous requests of others you yield a cheerful obedience, but to the just and tender requests of God you give a plain and evident denial. As clearly as actions can speak, you say by your neglect of the Sabbath, by your disregard of prayer, by your never reading the Bible, by your perseverance in known sin, and by the whole course of your life, "I will not." Like Pharaoh, you have demanded, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" You are of the same mind as those of old, who said, "It is vain to serve God, and what profit is there if we keep his ordinances?"

Moreover, my friend, you have not as yet given an assent to the doctrines of God's Word; on the contrary, *intellectually* as well as practically, you go not at God's bidding. You have set up in your mind the idea that you must understand everything before you will believe it—an idea, let me tell you, which you will never be able to carry out, for you cannot understand your own existence; and there are ten thousand other things around you which you never can comprehend, but which you must believe or remain for ever a gigantic fool. Still you cavil at this doctrine and that doctrine, railing at the gospel system in general; and if you were asked at a working man's conference, why you did not go to a place of worship, you would perhaps say that you kept away from worship because you did not like this doctrine or that. Let me say on my own account, that as far as I am personally concerned, it is a very small consideration to me whether you do like my doctrine or do not; for your own sake I am anxious above measure that you should believe the truth as it is in Jesus; but while you live in sin, your dislike of a doctrine, will very probably only make me feel the more sure of its truth, and lead me to preach it with more confidence and vehemence. Think you that we are to learn God's truth

from the likings or dislikings of those who refuse to worship him, and want an excuse for their sins. O unconverted men and women, it is very long before we shall come to you to learn what you would have us preach, and when we fall so low as to do that, you yourselves will despise us. What! shall the physician ask his patient what kind of medicine he would wish to have prescribed? Then the man needs no physician, he can prescribe for himself. Show the doctor out at the back door directly. What is the use of such a physician? Of what service is a minister who will truckle to depraved tastes and sinful appetites, and say, "How would you like me to preach to you? What smooth things shall I offer you?" Ah souls! we have some higher end to be served than merely pleasing you. We would save you by distasteful truths, for honeyed lies will ruin you. That teaching which the carnal mind most delights in, is the most deadly and delusive. With many of you, your beliefs, and tastes, and likes, must be changed, or else you will never enter heaven. I admit that in a measure I like your honesty in having said outright, "I will not serve God;" but it is an honesty which makes me shudder, for it betrays a heart hard as the nether millstone.

Again, you have said, "I will not serve God," and up to this time it is very possible that you have never been in the humour to repent of having said it, for the ways of sin are sweet to you, and your heart is fixed in its rebellion. You have never felt that conviction of sin which the Holy Spirit has wrought in some of us; if you had felt it, you would soon have been shaken out of your "I will not." If God's power of grace, of which thousands of us bear witness that it is as real a power as that which guides the stars or wings the wind—if God's almighty grace should once get a hold of you, you would no longer say, "I do not believe this or that;" for, as tremblingly as any of those whom you now despise, you would cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" Up till now you have never felt that power, and therefore I cannot wonder that you do not acknowledge it, although the testimony of honest witnesses ought to have some weight with you. You are practically, intellectually, and avowedly no Christian; you have never deceived yourself and others by making a profession which you do not honour, but you have gone on in your own chosen path, saying with more or less resolution, in answer to every call of the gospel, "I will not."

We said just now that the answer of the son to his father as recorded in our text was very plain; it was not, however, very genuine, or such as his father might have expected. His father said, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard;" and the son rudely said, "I will not, that is flat;" and without another word of apology or reason went his way. This is not quite as it should be. Is it? Even so, my friend, you may have been too hasty and so have been unjust. Is it not very possible you have denied to God and to his gospel the respect which both really deserve? You have spoken very plainly, but at the same time very thoughtlessly, very harshly to the God who has deserved better things of you. Have you ever given the claims of the Lord Jesus a fair consideration? Have you not dismissed the gospel with a sneer quite unworthy of you? Have you not been afraid to look the matters between God and your soul fairly in the face? I believe it to be the

case of hundreds here; I know it to be the case of thousands and tens of thousands in London. They have put their foot down, and they have said, "None of your religion for me! I have made up my mind and I will never alter; I hate it and will not listen to it." Does no small voice within ever tell them that this is not fair to themselves or to God? Is the matter so easily to be decided? Suppose it should turn out that the religion of Jesus is true, what then? What will be the lot of those who despised him? My hearer, the religion of Jesus is true, and I have proved its truth in my own case; do, I pray you, consider it, and do not trifle away your immortal soul. Thus saith the Lord, "Consider your ways."

It is now time for me to tell the openly ungodly what is his real state. You have been more than a little proud of your honesty; and looking down upon certain professors of religion you have said, "Ah! I make no such pretences as they do, I am honest, I am." Friend, you cannot have a greater abhorrence of hypocrites than I have; if you can find a fair chance of laughing at them, pray do so. If by any means you can stick pins into their wind-bags, and let the gas of their profession out, pray do so. I try to do a little of it in my way, do you do the same! You and I are agreed in this, I hope, in heartily hating anything like sham and falsehood; but if you begin to hold your head up, and think yourself so very superior because you make no profession, I must take you down a little by reminding you that it is no credit to a thief that he makes no profession of being honest, and it is not thought to be exceedingly honourable to a man that he makes no profession of speaking the truth. For the fact is, that a man who does not profess to be honest is a professed thief, and he who does not claim to speak the truth is an acknowledged liar; thus in escaping one horn you are thrown upon another, you miss the rock but run upon the quicksand. You are a confessed and avowed neglecter of God, a professed despiser of the great salvation, an acknowledged disbeliever in the Christ of God. When our Government at any time arrests persons suspected of Fenianism, they have no difficulty about those gentlemen who glory in wearing the green uniform and flaunting the big feather. "Come along," says the constable, "you are the man, for you wear the regimentals of a rebel." Even so when the angel of justice arrests the enemies of the Lord, he will have no difficulty in accusing and arresting you, for, laying his hand upon your shoulder, he will say, "You wear the regimentals of an enemy of God; you plainly, and unblushingly, acknowledge that you do not fear God nor trust in his salvation." No witnesses need be called concerning you at the last great day; you will stand up, not quite so bravely as you do to-day, for, when the heavens are on a blaze, and the earth is rocking to and fro, and the great white cloud fills the field of vision, and the eyes of the great Judge shall burn like lamps of fire, you will put on a different mien and a different carriage from that which you maintain before a poor preacher of the gospel Ah! my ungodly hearer, with such a case as thine there shall be no need to judge, for out of thine own mouth shalt thou be condemned.

Yet I came not here to tell you of your sins only, but to help you to escape from them. It is necessary that this much should be said, but we now turn to something far more pleasant. I am in hopes this day

that some of you will listen to that little word in the text, "*afterward.*" He said, "I will not; but *afterward* he repented, and went." It is a long lane which has no turning, let us trust that we have come to the turning now. There is space left you for repentance; though you may have been a drunkard, or a swearer, or unchaste, the die is not yet cast, a change is yet possible. May God grant that you may have reached the time when it shall be said of you, "Afterward he repented; he changed his mind; he believed upon Jesus, and obeyed the word of the Lord, and went." Perhaps the son in the parable thought a little more calmly about it. He said to himself, "I will consider the matter, second thoughts are often best. I growled at my good father, and gave him a sharp answer, and I saw the tear standing in the good man's eye. I am sorry I grieved him. The thought of grieving him makes me change my mind. I said 'No' to him," said he, "but I did not think about it. I forgot that if I go and work in my father's vineyard, I shall be working for myself, for I am his eldest son, and all that he has will belong to me, so that I am very foolish to refuse to work to my own advantage. Ah! now I see my father had my advantage at heart, I will even go as he bade me." See, he shoulders his tools, and away he marches to labour with all his might. He said, "I will not," but he repented and went, and it is admitted by all that he did the will of his father. Oh, I hope that many a man and woman now in this Agricultural Hall will this day cry, "I do retract what I have said. I will go to my Father, and will say to him, 'I will do thy bidding. I will not grieve thy love. I will not lose the opportunity of advancing my soul's best interest; I obey the gospel command.'" I will suppose that I see one such before me, and I will speak to him. Perhaps he said, "I will not," because he really did not understand what religion was. How few after all know what the way of salvation is; though they go to church, and to chapel, they have not yet learned God's plan of pardoning sinners. Do you know the plan of salvation? Hear it and live by it. You have offended God; God must punish sin; it is a fixed law that sin must be punished; how then can God have mercy upon you? Why, only in this way: Jesus Christ came from heaven and he suffered in the room, place, and stead of all who trust him; suffered what they ought to have suffered, so that God is just, and yet at the same time he is able to forgive the very chief of sinners through the merits of his dear Son. Your debts, if you be a believer in him, Christ has paid on your behalf. If you do but come and rest upon Jesus and upon Jesus only, God cannot punish you for your sins, for he punished Jesus for them, and it would not be just of him to punish Christ and then to punish you, to exact payment first from the Surety and afterwards from the debtor. My dear hearer, whoever thou mayst be, whatever thy past life may have been, if thou wilt trust Christ, thou shalt be saved from all thy sin in a moment, the whole of thy past life shall be blotted out; there shall not remain in God's book so much as a single charge against thy soul, for Christ who died for thee, shall take thy guilt away and leave thee without a blot before the face of God. Read the last verse of my text, and you will see that it was by believing that men entered into the kingdom of God of old, and it is still by believing that men are saved. "Behold the Lamb of God,"

said John the Baptist, and if you look to that bleeding Lamb, you shall live. Do you understand this? Is it not simple? Is it not suitable to you. Will you still refuse to obey it? Does not the Holy Spirit prompt you to relent? Do you not even now say, "Is it so simple? I will even trust in Jesus:

'Guilty, but with heart relenting,
To the Saviour's wounds I'll fly.'

I will come, by God's help, this morning, lest death should come before the sun sets. I will trust Christ to save me. Precious way of salvation! Why should I not be saved?"

It is possible too, that you may have said, "I will not," because you really thought there was no hope for you. Ah! my friend, let me assure you—and oh! how glad I am to be able to do it—that there is hope for the vilest through the precious blood of Jesus. No man can have gone too far for the long arm of Christ to reach him. Christ delights to save the biggest sinners. He said to his apostles, "Preach the gospel to every creature, but begin"—where? "begin at Jerusalem. There live the wretches who spat in my face. There live the cruel ones that drove the nails through my hands. Go and preach the gospel to them first. Tell them that I am able to save, not little sinners merely, but the very chief of sinners. Tell them to trust in me and they shall live." Where are you, you despairing one? I know the devil will try to keep the sound of the gospel from your ears if he can, and therefore, I would "cry aloud and spare not." O ye despairing sinners, there is no room for despair this side the gates of hell. If you have gone through the foulest kennels of iniquity, no stain can stand out against the power of the cleansing blood.

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose ALL their guilty stains."

Oh, I trust, now that you know there is hope for you, you will say, "I will even come at once, and put my trust in Jesus."

While I would thus encourage you to repent of your neglect of God, let me invite you to come to Jesus, and press it upon you yet again. Ah! my dear friend, you will soon be dying, and though some wicked men, in their stupid insensibility, die very calmly, and as David said, "They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men, but their strength is firm," yet, whether they perceive it or not, it is a dreadful thing to die with unpardoned sin hanging about you. What will your guilty soul do when it leaves the body? Think of it a minute. It is a matter worthy of your thought. Some of you, in all probability, will die this week. It is not probable that so many thousands of us will march through a whole week, and be found alive at the other end of it. Well then, as we *may* some of us go soon, and all of us *must* go ere long, let us look before us and think a bit. Imagine your soul unclothed of the body. You have left the body behind you, and your disembodied spirit finds itself in a new world. Oh, it will be a glorious thing if that separated spirit shall see Jesus whom it has loved, and fly at once into his bosom, and drink for ever of the crystal fountain of ever-flowing bliss: but it will be a

horrible thing if instead of it, your naked shivering spirit should wake up to find itself friendless, homeless, helpless, hopeless, tormented with remorse, afflicted with despair. What if it should have to cry out for ever, "I knew my duty but I did it not, I knew the way of salvation but I would not run in it. I heard the gospel, but I shut my hears to it. I lived and at length left the world without Christ, and here I am, past hope, no repenting now, no believing now, no escaping now, for mercy and love no longer rule the hour." Have pity on thyself, my hearer. I have pity on thee. Oh, if my hand could pluck thee from that flame, how cheerfully would I do it! Shall I pity thee and wilt thou not pity thyself? Oh, if my pleadings should by God's grace persuade you to trust in Christ this morning, I would plead with you while voice, and lungs, and heart, and life held out! But oh, have pity on thyself! Pity that poor naked spirit which so soon will be quivering with utmost agony, a self-caused agony, an agony from which it would not escape, an agony of which it was warned, but which it chose to endure sooner than give up sin and yield to the sceptre of sovereign grace.

I would fain hope that you are saying, "I do now repent, and by God's grace I will go." If so, let me tell you there are a great many in heaven who once, like you, said, "I will not," but they afterwards repented and are now saved. I will give you one picture. Yonder, I see a company of men on horseback, and there is one, the proudest of them all, to whom they act as a guard; they are going to Damascus, that he may take Christians to prison and compel them to blaspheme. Saul of Tarsus is the name of that cruel, murderous persecutor. When Stephen was put to death, God said to this man Saul, "Go, work in my vineyard," but Saul said plainly, "I will not," and to prove his emnity, he helped to put Stephen to death. There he is riding in hot haste, upon his evil errand, none more set and determined against the Lord. Yet my Lord Jesus can tame the lion, and even make a lamb of him. As he rides along, a bright light is seen, brighter than the sun at noonday; he falls from his horse, he lies trembling on the ground, and he hears a voice out of heaven, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Lifting up his eyes with astonishment, he sees that he had ignorantly been persecuting the Son of God. What a change that one discovery wrought in him. That voice, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," broke his hard heart, and won him to the cause. You know how three days after that, that once proud and bigoted man was baptized upon profession of the faith of Christ, whom he had just now persecuted! and if you want to see an earnest preacher, where can you find a better than the apostle Paul, who, with heart on fire, writes again and again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." I hope there is a Saul here, who is to be struck down this morning. Lord, strike him down! Eternal Spirit strike him down *now!* You did not know perhaps, that you had been fighting God, but you thought the religion of Jesus to be a foolish dream. You did not know that you had insulted the dying Saviour; now you do know it, may your conscience be affected, and from this day forth may you serve the Lord.

I must leave this second point when I have just said this. If there be one here who after a long refusal, at last relents, and is willing to become a servant of God by faith in Jesus Christ, let me tell him for his encouragement, he shall not be one whit behind those who have been so long making a profession without being true to it, for the text says, "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom;" but what else? "Go into the kingdom" *before* those who made a profession of serving God, but who were not true to it. You great sinners shall have no back seats in heaven! There shall be no outer court for you. You great sinners shall have as much love as the best, as much joy as the brightest of saints. You shall be near to Christ; you shall sit with him upon his throne; you shall wear the crown; your fingers shall touch the golden harps; you shall rejoice with the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. Will ye not come? Christ forgets your past ill manners, and bids ye come to-day. "Come," saith he, "unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Thirty years of sin shall be forgiven, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it in. Fifty, sixty, seventy years of iniquity shall all disappear as the morning's hoar-frost disappears before the sun. Come and trust my Master, hiding in his bleeding wounds.

"Raise thy downcast eyes, and see
What throngs His throne surround!
These, though sinners once like thee,
Have full salvation found.
Yield not then to unbelief;
He says, 'There yet is room:'
Though of sinners thou art chief,
Since Jesus calls thee, come."

II. Bear with me a little time while I speak to the second character, THE DECEPTIVELY SUBMISSIVE, by far the most numerous everywhere in England, probably the most numerous in this assembly. Oh! you, my own regular hearers, you who have heard my voice these thirteen years, many of you are in this class. You have said to the Great Father, "I go, sir!" but you have not gone. Let me sorrowfully sketch your portraits: you have regularly frequented a place of worship, and you would shudder to waste a single Sunday in an excursion, or in any form of Sabbath breaking. Outwardly you have said," I go, sir." When the hymn is given out, you stand up and sing, and yet you do not sing with the heart. When I say, "Let us pray!" you cover your faces, but you do not pray with real prayer. You utter a polite, respectful "I go, sir," but you do not go. You give a notional assent to the gospel. If I were to mention any doctrine, you would say, "Yes, that is true. I believe that." But your heart does not believe: you do not believe the gospel in the core of your nature, for if you did, it would have an effect upon you. A man may say, "I believe my house is on fire," but if he goes to bed and falls to sleep, it does not look as if he believed it, for when a man's house is on fire he tries to escape. If some of you really believed that there is a hell, and that there is a heaven, as you believe other things, you would act very differently from what you now do. I must add that many of you say, "I go, sir," in a

very solemn sense, for when we preach earnestly the tears run down your cheeks, and you go home to your bedrooms, and you pray a little, and everybody thinks that your concern of mind will end in conversion: but your goodness is "like the morning cloud and the early dew." You are like dunghills with snow upon them: while the snow lasts you look white and fair, but when the snow melts the dunghill remains a dunghill still. Oh, how many very impressible hearts are like that! You sin, and yet you come to a place of worship, and tremble under the word; you transgress, and you weep and transgress again; you feel the power of the gospel after a fashion, and yet you revolt against it more and more. Ah! my friends, I can look some of you in the face and know that I am describing some of your cases to the letter. You have been telling lies to God all these years, by saying, "I go, sir," while you have not gone. You know that to be saved you must believe in Jesus, but you have not believed. You know that you must be born again, but you are still strangers to the new birth. You are as religious as the seats you sit on, but no more; and you are as likely to get to heaven as those seats are, but not one whit more, for you are dead in sin, and death cannot enter heaven. O my dear hearers, I lament that ever I should be called to say such a thing as this, and not be more affected by the fact; and, wonder of wonders, that you, some of you, know it to be true, and yet do not feel alarmed thereby! It is the easiest thing in the world to impress some of you by a sermon, but, I fear me, you never will get beyond mere transient impressions. Like the water when lashed, the wound soon heals. You know, and you know, and you know; and you feel, and feel, and feel again, and yet your sins, your self-righteousness, your carelessness, or your wilful wickedness, cause you, after having said, "I go, sir," to forget the promise and lie unto God.

Now, I spoke very honestly to the other class, and must be equally plain with you. You, too, *criminate yourselves*. There will be no need of witnesses against you. You have admitted that the gospel is true. You did not quarrel with the doctrine of future punishment or future glory. You attended a place of worship, and you said that God was good and worthy to be served; you confessed that you owed allegiance to him, and ought to render it. You have even knelt down and in prayer you have said, "Lord, I deserve thy wrath." The great God has only to turn to some of your formal prayers to find quite enough evidence to secure your condemnation. Those morning prayers of yours, those evening prayers, hypocritical every one of them, will be more than sufficient to condemn you of your own mouth. Take heed! take heed, I pray you, while you are yet in the land of hope.

All this while, as the thirty-second verse reminds me, while you have remained unsaved, you have seen publicans and harlots saved by the very gospel which has had no power upon you. Do not you know it, young man? You, I mean, the son of a godly mother? You know that you are not saved, and yet you had a drunken workman in your father's employment, and he has been these last few years a sober Christian man, he is saved, and you perhaps have taken to the habits which he has forsaken. You know that there have been picked off of the streets poor fallen women who have been brought to know Christ,

who are among the sweetest and fairest flowers in Christ's garden now, though they were once castaways; and yet some of you respectable people who never committed any outward vice in your lives, are still unconverted, and still saying to Christ, "I go, sir," but you have not gone. You are still without God! Without Christ! Lost, lost, lost! Yet fairer outward characters could scarcely be found. I could fain weep for you! Oh! beware, beware of being like the apples of Sodom, which are green to look upon, but when crushed, crumble to ashes. Beware of being like John Bunyan's trees that were green outside, but inwardly rotten, and only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box. Oh! beware of saying as some of you do, "I go, sir," while you go not. I sometimes see sick people who quite alarm and distress me. I say to them, "My dear friend, you are dying; have you a hope?" There is no answer. "Do you know your lost state?" "Yes, sir." "Christ died for sinners." "Yes, sir." "Faith gives us of his grace." "Yes, sir." They say, "Yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir." I sometimes wish before God they would contradict me, for if they would but have honesty enough to say, "I do not believe a word of it," I should know how to deal with them. Stubborn oaks are levelled by the gale, but those who bend like the willow before every wind, what wind shall break them? O dear brethren, beware of being gospel-hardened; or, what is the same thing, softened but for a season. Beware of being a promising hearer of the word, and nothing more!

I do not mean to close my discourse by speaking to you in this apparently harsh way, which, harsh as it seems, is full of love to your soul. I have a good word for *you* too. I trust that you, in this Agricultural Hall, will have a change wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, for although these many years you have made false professions before God; there is yet room in his gospel feast for you. Did you notice the text? "The publicans and sinners enter into the kingdom of heaven *before you*." Then it is clear you may come after them, because it could not be said they entered *before* you, if you did not come after them. If the Lord shall break your heart, you will be willing to take the Lord Jesus for your all in all in just the same way as a drunkard must, though you have not been a drunkard. You will be willing to rest in the merit of Jesus just as a harlot must, though you have never been such. There is room for you, young people, yet, though you have broken your vows, and quenched your convictions. Ay, and you grey-headed people may be brought yet, though you have lived so long in the outward means, but have never given up your hearts to Jesus. Oh, come! This twenty-fourth day of March, may the Lord bring you In this very place may the Lord lead you to say silently, "By the grace of God I will not be an open pretender any longer; I will give myself up to those dear hands that bled for me, and that dear heart that was pierced for me, and I will this day submit to Jesus' way.

The fact is, to close the subject, there is, my dear friends, the same gospel to be preached to one class of men as to every other class. I pray God the day may never come when we shall be found in our preaching talking about working classes, and middle classes, and upper classes. I know no difference between you, you are the same to me when I preach the gospel, whether you are kings and queens, or crossing

sweepers; satin and cotton, broadcloth and fustian, are alike to the gospel. If you are peers of the realm, we trim not our gospel to suit you, and if you are the basest of thieves, we do not exclude you from the voice of mercy. The gospel comes to men as sinners, all equally fallen in Adam, equally lost and ruined by sin. I have not one gospel for Her Majesty the Queen, and another gospel for the beggar-woman. No, there is but one way of salvation, but one foundation, but one propitiation, but one gospel. Look to the cross of Christ and live. High was the brazen serpent lifted, and all that Moses said was, "Look." Was a prince of the house of Judah bitten, he was told to look; without looking his lion standard of costly emblazonry could not avail him; was some poor wretch in the camp bitten, he must look, and the efficacy was the same for him as for the greatest of the host. Look! look! look to Jesus. Believe in the Son of God and live! One brazen serpent for all the camp, one Christ for all ranks and conditions of men. What a blessing would it be if we were all enabled to trust Christ this morning! My brethren, why not? He is worthy of the confidence of all. The Spirit of God is able to work faith in all. O poor sinner, look to him! Dear hearers, I may never speak to some of you again, and I would therefore be pressing with you; by the hour of death, by the solemnities of eternity, I do implore and beseech you accept the only remedy for sin which even God himself will ever offer to the dying sons of men, the remedy of a bleeding Substitute, suffering in your room and stead, believed on and accepted in the heart. Cast yourself flat upon Christ. The way of salvation is just this—rest alone upon Christ! Depend wholly upon him. The negro was asked what he did, and he said, "I jest fall down on de rock, and he dat is down on de rock cannot fall no lower." Down on the rock, sinner! Down on the rock! The everlasting rock of ages! You cannot fall lower than that. I will conclude with a well-known illustration. Your condition is like that of a child in a burning house, who, having escaped to the edge of the window, hung on by the window-sill. The flames were pouring out of the window underneath, and the poor lad would soon be burnt, or falling would be dashed to pieces; he therefore held on with the clutch of death. He did not dare to relax his grasp till a strong man stood underneath, and said, "Boy! drop! drop! I'll catch you." Now, it was no saving faith for the boy to believe that the man was strong—that was a good help towards faith—but he might have known that and yet have perished; it was faith when the boy let go and dropped down into his big friend's arms. There are you, sinner, clinging to your sins or to your good works. The Saviour cries, "Drop! drop into my arms!" It is not doing, it is leaving off doing. It is not working, it is trusting in that work which Jesus has already done. Trust! that is the word, simple, solid, hearty, earnest trust. Trust and it will not take an hour to save you, the moment you trust you are saved. You may have come in here as black as hell, but if you trust in Jesus you are wholly forgiven. In an instant, swifter than a flash of lightning the deed of grace is done. O may God the Spirit do it now, bringing you to trust, that you may be saved.

Work for Jesus

"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard"—Matthew xxi. 28.

I AM not going to confine myself to the connection of these words, nor to use them strictly after the manner in which they were first spoken. I may, perhaps, explain the parable very briefly at the close; but I take leave to withdraw these words from their immediate context, and use them as a voice which, I believe, sounds often in the ears of God's people, and sometimes sounds in vain.—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." It is certain that God still speaks to us. He has spoken to us in his word. There are his precepts and promises; his statutes and testimonies. He that hath ears to hear let him hear these sacred oracles. But beside this open revelation there are counsels and rebukes more closely and personally addressed to the conscience; voices—soft sometimes as whispers, at other times loud as the thunders that pealed from Sinai. The Lord has a way of speaking to men when "he openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction," as Elihu said. Thus he speaks when he calls them effectually by his grace in conversion. So he once called "Samuel, Samuel," till the child answered. So he said, "Matthew, follow me." So he called out, "Zaccheus, come down." So he cried out, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" So he bid some of us till the divine accents were clear and irresistible. In like manner we have, many of us, heard him say, "Son, give me thy heart;" and we have given him our hearts: we could do no otherwise. That voice exerted such a charming spell and swayed us with such a divine power that we were subdued by it, and we yielded our hearts to the God of love. Since then you who know the Lord must often have heard a voice speaking to you and bidding you seek his face in prayer. Perhaps you have been busy with the world, but you found an impulse of a mysterious kind coming over you, and you have been fain to withdraw yourself for a few minutes to the closet that you might speak with God. You know how it has been when you have been meditating alone, and yet not alone. One whose presence you knew, whose face you could not see, was with you. You felt as if you must pray. It has not been any effort on your part. The exercise has been as easy as

to breathe and as pleasant as to partake of your daily bread. You felt the Lord drawing you to the mercy-seat and saying in your soul, "My son, ask what thou wilt and it shall be done unto thee." You must have been conscious of such a voice as that.

And have you not at times, in the silence of your mind, heard the Lord call you to a closer communion with himself? Has not the sense, if not the words, of the spouse in the canticle been heard in your soul,—"Come, my beloved, let us see if the vines flourish. Come with me from Lebanon my spouse, with me from Lebanon"? You have been up and away. You have gone into the secret places where Christ has shown you his love, till you sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit has been sweet to your taste. Our experience makes us know that there are heavenly voices that invite prayer and call to communion. And probably some of you have also been conscious of another voice which I earnestly desire we may all hear to-night, namely, the more martial and stirring call to service for the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of you have been obedient to the call these many years, and it calls louder and louder and louder still. You have been reaping, and bearing the heat and burden of the day, but you cannot throw down your sickle, your hand cleaves to it. Yea, rather do you take more gigantic strides and sweep down more of the precious corn at every stroke you take. You feel that you can never cease from it till you do

> "Your body with your charge lay down,
> And cease at once to work and live."

A voice divine seems calling thee and saying, "Follow me, and I will make thee a fisher of men. Behold I have made thee a chosen vessel to bear my name unto the Gentiles." You have heard that voice, and you are striving to obey it more and more.

Others either have never heard it, or hearing it have forgotten it. There are none so deaf as those who will not hear, and there are some who have a very deaf ear to any admonitions of this kind. They are like Issachar—a strong ass crouching down between two burdens, but yet lifting neither. I fear lest upon them should come the curse of Meroz, because they come not "to the help of the Lord—to the help of the Lord against the mighty." Now, mayhap this evening there are some Christian men or women here that shall feel as if the hand of the Crucified were laid upon them, and they hear him say to them, "Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price; wherefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits, which are his. Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

The text, I hope, may be blest of God to be such a voice as that. Listening to it, we notice four things. First, *the character under which it calls us*, "Son"; secondly, *the service to which it calls us*, "go work"; thirdly, *the time for which it calls us*, "go work to-day"; and fourthly, *the place to which it directs us*, "go work to-day in my vineyard."

I. First, then, THE CHARACTER UNDER WHICH IT CALLS US.

It appears to me to be a very powerful selection of terms. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." It puts work on a very gracious footing, when we are bidden to work for the Lord, not as slaves, nor as mere servants, but as sons. Moses speaks to us, and he says, "Servant, go

and work for thy wages." But the Father in Christ speaks to us, and he says, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." No more as a servant, but as a son, shalt thou serve the Lord. The returning prodigal said, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." That was not an evangelical prayer, and was not answered. The father said, "This my son was dead, and is alive again," and so he received him, not as a hired servant at all, but as a son. Oh, dear people of God, I trust you always draw the distinction very clearly between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. When you work for God you do not work *for* life but *from* life. You do not try to serve Christ in order that you may be saved, but because you are saved. You do not obey his commands that you may become his children, but because you are his children, and therefore are imitators of God as dear children. You say "Abba, Father," because you feel the spirit of adoption within you, and you endeavour to obey the commands of your Father for the self-same reason. I do not, therefore, say to anyone here, "Go and work for God that you may be saved." I would not venture to put it on that footing. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But turning to those who are saved, the gospel exhortation is put after a gospel sort—"Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

And it has all the more strength on this account, because, in addressing us as sons, it reminds us of the great love which has made us what we are. We were by nature heirs of wrath even as others, but, beloved, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Think of the love which chose us when we were still aliens and enemies; the love which adopted us, and put us into the family, itself wondering while it did it, for the Lord is represented as saying, "How shall I put thee among the children?"—as if it were a strange thing that such as we are should ever be numbered among the children of God. The love which adopted us did not stay there, but having given us the rights of children, it gave us the nature of children, wherefore we were regenerated—"Begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; born, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." Now, just think of election, adoption, regeneration, and when the Lord addresses you by that term of "son," think of all that and say, "I owe to God an immeasurable debt of gratitude for having enabled me to become his son: giving me power and privilege to become a child of God. Therefore do I feel the claims of obligation, and I would endeavour to work in the vineyard because I am his child, his son, his daughter, made so by his grace."

This you see, dear friends, engages us to work in the vineyard all the more cogently, because we may reflect not only on the grace which has made us sons, but on the privileges which that same grace bestowed upon us in making us sons; for, if children of God, the Lord will provide for us, will clothe us, will heal us, will protect us, will guide us, will educate us, will make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Remember, too, that precious passage, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." If heirs of God, how large is our inheritance, and if joint heirs with Christ how sure that inheritance

is; and we have been brought now, beloved, to such an estate as this that the angels themselves might envy us, for I venture to apply a passage of Scripture to this case—I hope without wresting it—"Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son?" But he speaks thus to us poor worms of the dust, and when he is bidding us serve him he comes to us under this character, and addresses us in this relationship, and he says, "Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard. I have given thee privileges boundless in making thee my child. I have given thee this world and worlds to come. Earth is thy lodge, and heaven thy home. And therefore, because I have done all this for thee —and what could I have done more for thee than have made thee my child?—therefore I say, Go, work to-day in my vineyard."

In appealing thus to us under the name of son, it is supposed that we have some feelings within us correspondent to the condition to which our heavenly Father has called us. He says, "son." If any of you, being a son, hath a father, and if that father wished you to do something for him, and he addressed you as "my son," you would feel at once that whatever you could do you were bound to do because you were a son. It would awaken in you the filial feeling which is swift at once to yield obedience and love. And when the Lord looks upon thee, my brother, and says to thee "Son," it is supposed that there is in thy heart a child's nature given by his grace, and that this filial instinct prompts the quick response, "My Father, what dost thou say to me? Speak, Lord, speak, Father, for thy son heareth thee. I long to do thy will. I delight in it, for to me it is the greatest joy I know that thou art my Father and my God. Therefore, Lord, my heart stands ready now to listen to whatever thou hast to say, and my hand is ready to do it, as thy grace shall enable me, only strengthen me in thy ways." Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard.

By the use of that term "son," also, it is supposed that you have something of the qualification that will fit you to do what he bids you. A man who has a vineyard naturally supposes that his son knows something about vineyards. The boy will have learned something through his sire, and you that know the Lord are the only people that can serve him in his vineyard—that is to say, in winning souls for Christ none can do this but those who are won themselves. If there be a lost child to be reclaimed, he shall be brought in by one of the children who has himself been found. Unto the wicked God saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" but to you who are his sons and daughters he entrusts the gospel, putting you in trust with it that you may bear it to others and bring others to know and love his name. Oh, dear friends, it must be a dreadful thing to be trying to save the souls of others while you yourselves are lost; and what an unhappy mortal must he be who has to preach the gospel that he never knew—to tell of promises that he has never believed, and to preach a Christ in whom his soul has never trusted! But when the Lord speaks to you as his son and his daughter, the very fact that you stand in that relationship to him proves that you have some qualification for the service; and, therefore, dear brother or sister, you must not back out of it. You must not wrap your talent in a napkin, for you have got some talent in the very fact of being a child of God—a son or daughter of the Most High.

Thus have I tried to open up the character to whom the Lord speaks, but I cannot do it so as to interest those who are not his people. But I do say this to those of you who are a people near unto him, to whom he stands as a Father, that this fact has strong claims upon you. If I be a Father, where is my honour? If ye be my children, where is your fear? If indeed the Lord has put you into his family, do you not owe to him the obedience and the love of children, and what can be more natural that if there be a household work to do—vineyard work to do—your Father should look to you to do it, and turn to you whom he has loved so long and loved so well, and say, "Son, daughter, go work to-day in my vineyard"?

II. Well, now, secondly, let us turn to the next point, and that is, THE SERVICE TO WHICH THE LORD CALLS US—"Go work."

I know some Christians who do not like the name of work, and they look very black in the face if you say anything about duty. As for the matter of that, I do not mind how black they look, because there are some people who very much expose their own disposition by black looks and sullen moods; and when they turn sour they only manifest what is in their own nature. He that quarrels with the precept quarrels with God. Let him mind that. And he that does not like the practical part of Christianity may do what he likes with the doctrinal part of it, for he has neither part nor lot in this matter. The language of the true child of God is, "I delight myself in thy precepts"; and, as David put it, "Thy precepts have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage." He would even sing about the precepts of the gospel. And now the text says, "Go work." That is something practical, something real. Go work. He does not say, "My son, go and think and speculate, and make curious experiments, and fetch out some new doctrines and astonish all thy fellow creatures with whims and oddities of thine own." "My son, go work." And he does not here say, "My son, go and attend conferences one after another all the year round and live in a perpetual maze of hearing different opinions and going from one public meeting and one religious engagement to another, and so feed thyself on the fat things full of marrow." All this is to be attended to in its proper proportion, but here it is "Go work: go work." How many Christians there are that seem to read, "Go plan;" and they always figure in a way with some wonderful plan for the conversion of all the world, but they are never found labouring to convert a baby—never having a good word to say to the tiniest child in the Sunday-school. They are always scheming, and yet never effecting anything. But the text says, "My son, go work." Oh, yes, but those who do not like to work themselves display the greatness of their talents in finding fault with those who do work, and a very clear perception they have of the mistakes and the crotchets of the very best of workers, whose zeal and industry are alike unflagging. Howbeit the text does not say, "My son, go and criticize;" what it distinctly says, is, "Go and work." I remember that when Andrew Fuller had a very severe lecture from some Scotch Baptist brethren about the discipline of the church, he made the reply, "You say that your discipline is so much better than ours. Very well, but discipline is meant to make good soldiers. Now, my soldiers fight better than yours, and I think therefore that you ought not to say much about my discipline." So the

real thing is not to be for ever calculating about modes of church government, and methods of management and plans to be adopted and rules to be laid down, which it shall be accounted a serious breach to violate. All well in their place, for order is good in its way. But come, now, let us go to work. Let us have something done. I believe the very best working for God is often done in a very irregular manner. I get more and more to feel like the old soldier of Waterloo when he was examined about the best garment that could be worn by a soldier. The Duke of Wellington said to him, "If you had to fight Waterloo over again how would you like to be dressed?" The answer was, "Please, sir, I should like to be in my shirt-sleeves." I think that is about the best. Get rid of everything superfluous, and get at it and hack away. I would to God that some Christians could do that, just strip to it, get rid of the superfluities of orderliness and propriety, and everything else which hampers them in trying to get back poor souls. There they are, going down to hell, and we are stickling about this mode and that, and considering the best way not to do it, and appointing committees to consider and debate, to adjourn and to postpone, and to leave the work in abeyance. The best way is to arise and do it, and let the committee sit afterwards. God grant we may. My son, go *work* to-day. Let it be something practical, something real, something actually done.

And by good work is meant something that will involve effort, toil, earnestness, self-denial, perhaps something that will want perseverance. In right earnest you will need to stick to it. You will have heartily to yield yourself up to it, and give up a good deal else that might hinder you in doing it. Oh, Christian men and women, you will not glorify God much unless you really put your strength into the ways of the Lord, and throw your body, soul, and spirit—your entire manhood and womanhood—into the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this you need not leave your families, or your shops, or your secular engagements. You can serve God in these things. They will often be vantage grounds of opportunity for you, but you must throw yourself into it. A man does not win souls to Christ while he is himself half asleep. The battle that is to be fought for the Lord Jesus must be fought by men who are wide awake and quickened by the Spirit of God. "My son, go work to-day." Do not go and play at teaching in Sunday-schools. Do not go and play the preacher. Do not go and play at exhorting people at the corners of streets, or even play at giving away tracts. "My son, go work." Throw thy soul into it. If it is worth doing it is worth doing well; and if it is worth doing well, it is worth doing better than you have ever done it yet; and even then it will be worth doing better still, for when you have done your best you have still to reach forward to a something far beyond; for the best of the best is all too little for such a God and for such a service. "My son, go work."

Well, now, such a claim as this may, perhaps, you think, sound rather hard; but I could tell you of many who would be very glad indeed if the Lord would say that to them. I might tell you of some who seldom leave their couches, some who can seldom sit upright through their weakness, to whom the nights are often full of pain, and the days are spent in weariness. They have learned, by God's teaching, to be content to

suffer; but sometimes they cannot stifle an ardent wish; they wish the Lord would let them serve him. They do not envy, but yet there sometimes crosses over their mind the shadow of something like envy when they recollect what opportunities some of you have, who are full of health and strength. I have seen my brother minister laid aside, the voice perhaps gone, the lungs feeble, the heart prone to palpitate, and, oh, how he has wished that he could preach. With what fervour has he said, "Oh, if I had but those opportunities over again, how I would try to use them better than when I was favoured with them! I tell you there are thousands of God's servants who would kiss the dust of his feet if he would only say to them, "Go work." I remember reading of a minister who had been labouring in America till he had fairly broken down. He had to take a tour for his health. He had not been away many days before he wrote in his diary, "There may be some ministers who count it a pleasure to be relieved from the duty of preaching, but I count it a misery. I would sooner preach as I have done in my own pulpit continually than I would see all the kingdoms of the world." And, indeed, there is no pleasure in the world like that of serving God. You will soon get tired if you have a vacation, but you will never get tired of a divine vocation, though you may sometimes grow tired in it. Now, think that the Lord might have said to you, "Now, go and lie on that bed for ten years. Go and pine away in consumption. I have nothing much for you to do. You have got to bear my will." Are you not very glad that you are full of strength, or that you have some share of it, and that now your heavenly Father says, "Son, go work. I have given you strength: go work"? Lord, we thank thee for so kind and gentle a command.

Besides, there is a great deal of honour in this work. You know how much your little boy wants to be a man. All boys do. When he first wears stick-up collars he congratulates himself upon the sign of anything like being a man. How proud he is of it! And if you, being a father, were to say to your boy, "My son, you are now of such an age that I can trust you to do some work for me"; see how the little man would begin to lift himself up: he is glad of it. And I am sure that if we look at it rightly, we who are the children of God ought to feel honoured by our heavenly Father saying to us, "You may do something for me." We must be very humble, for, after all, we cannot do anything except as he worketh in us to will and to do. But it is really very gratifying and ennobling to a poor mortal spirit to be allowed to do anything for God, ay, and to do what perfect saints above and holy angels cannot do; for oh, dear brother, there is no glorified spirit that can go down that back street and up that blind alley, and up those staircases that seem as if they would tumble down under your feet. Go and talk to that dying woman about Christ. You have a privilege which honoured Gabriel has not got: be thankful that you have it. There is no angel that can take that little child in the Sunday-school class and tell it of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," and carry the little lamb for the Good Shepherd. The Lord sends you to do it. And it should be a point of thankfulness with us all that he has counted us worthy, and put us into the ministry—into any part or parcel of that ministry—to do something for his name's sake. Well, we are always

receiving—always receiving, and it is very blessed; but still in this, as in other things, it is more blessed to give than to receive; and when we can give back to God some little trifle of service, stained with our tears because it is no better than it is, oh, it is a happy and a blessed thing. How grateful you ought to be that the Lord does say to you, "Son, go work to-day."

And remember, once more, on this point, that the work to which the Lord calls us is very varied, therefore there is a great deal of change in it; and, besides that, it suits the different temperaments, constitutions, dispositions, and abilities of his people. He says, "My son, go work to-day in my vineyard." But he does not give you to do my work, and he does not give me to do your work. Dear sister, you would like to do the work of such and such an excellent Christian woman, would not you? Yes, but that is naughty of you. Be satisfied to do your own. Suppose your housemaid always wanted to do the cook's work, the house would soon be in bad order. Better keep to your own place, dear sister. Ah, there is a brother here who says, "I think I could preach if I only had such and such a congregation." Very likely, brother, but you had better preach to your own and do what good you can there. Very likely I should do better with my own congregation, and you will do better with yours than I should. Every man had better keep to his own work in his own place. And how thankful we ought to be that if one can preach a sermon, yet another can offer a prayer,—that if one can go and speak to thousands, yet another can speak to ones and twos. There is work in the school; there is work in the family; there is work in the street; there is work in the workshop; there is work everywhere for Jesus if thou wilt but stretch out thy hand to find it and follow Solomon's good advice, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

III. Now, THE TIME is the next thing. "My son, go work *to-day*." That means directly—now.

Brother, sister, I will not say a word about what it is your duty to do to-morrow. Let the morrow take care of itself. I will have nothing to say about what it will be right for you to do in ten years' time. If you are alive, grace will be given to you for that. But what I have to say to you in God's name is, "Go work to-day," and as the sun has gone down, let it be, "Go work to-night in my vineyard," if there be opportunity, even to-night, ere another day's sun has dawned upon the world. "And why to-day?" Because, brother, thy Father wants thee to be at it at once. "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" If thou hast done nothing for Christ thou hast wasted enough time. Do not rest to-day, but be at it now. He wants thee to do it now, because the vines are in a certain condition that just now require work. There is somebody in the world who is in a tender state of mind, to whom thou mayest speak successfully. There is a mourner here who wants comfort to-night. There is one struggling against his conscience, who wants urging on to-night in the right way. If the case be neglected to-night it will be like neglecting to trim the vines just at the proper time for taking away the superfluous wood. Now canst thou do it. Thou canst not do it on any other day. Therefore, "go work to-day."

"To-day," because there are certain dangers to which those whom

thou art about to bless are just now exposed. The devil is tempting them: it is needful that thou go and help them against that temptation. They are just now in despair; it is needful that thou step in with the word of comfort from thy Master's mouth. They are, perhaps, this very night, before they go to their rest, about to commit a great sin. Mayhap the Lord means thee to interpose just now, ere that sin be done. Son, go work to-day; thou art wanted. There are very few labourers just now: many of them have gone. Son, do thou go to-day, while the others have gone out for their recreation—while the others are asleep and grown idle. There is a gap just now: it is at this moment. Many a brave deed of valour owed its success to being done at once. If Horatius had not kept the bridge just in that same moment when the enemy endeavoured to pass over, we should never have heard of him, nor of the brave deeds of old. There is a time of dearth—of want: there is an urgency. Son, God saith to thee, "Haste thee now, even now, and go work to-day in my vineyard." "To-day:" mark that.

It means work all the day: work as long as ever you live. Son, if once thou get into that vineyard do not come home again until the day is done. I am always sorry when I hear of Christian people beginning to give up some of their work before the infirmities of old age come on; although I think that many a minister, when he gets old, had better give up a charge for which he is not equal and take one smaller for which his strength would avail. But I know that some give up this work and that, and they say, "Let the young people come and take their turn." Yes, yes, but suppose the sun were to stop shining and say, "There is a star over there; let him have a turn and shine instead of me." Suppose the moon were for ever to give up shining in the night watches, and say that she has had enough of being out at night; and suppose the earth were to say it has had enough of yielding harvests. "Why should I yield any more? Let the sea take its turn and grow corn." And so, dear Christian friends, keep on as long as you can. Who can blame dear old John Newton? When he got too feeble to get up the pulpit stairs of St. Mary Woolnoth, he was helped up, and then, leaning on his pulpit Bible he poured out his soul. A friend of his said to him, "Dear Mr. Newton, don't you think you ought to give up preaching?" "What!" said he, "shall the old African blasphemer ever give up praising the grace of God as long as there is breath in his body? Never." And so he went to his work again. Oh, for more of that spirit to persevere in the Master's service.

Only there is this thought: it is only a day. "Son, go work to-day." It will only be a day. The longest life is no more, and then the shadows of death will gather: but there will be no night, for instead thereof the day shall break and the shadows shall flee away, and then life's service here below will all be over. There will be no troublesome children to teach, no hard-hearted sinners to rebuke, no backsliding, lukewarm Christians to reprove, no deceivers to encounter, no sceptics to answer with the testimony that cannot be shaken, no scoffers to put up with, patiently bearing their contumely. It will be all over then; and then shall those who have served their Master behold him gird himself and sit down and serve them, and they shall feast at his table and enter into his joy. "My son, go work to-day," for thou shalt rest to-morrow. Work

on, for there is rest enough in heaven: work on, for eternity shall well repay thee for the toils of time.

IV. Then; as to THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD CALLS US TO THE WORK. "My son, go work to-day in *my vineyard.*"

I like to think of this special sphere of labour, because it must be a pleasure to work in our Father's vineyard, for there everything that we do will be done for him. I trim this vine; it is my Father's vine. I dig this trench; but it is my Father's ground I turn. I gather out these stones; it is my Father's vineyard that I am engaged in clearing. I repair this fence; it is my Father's soil that I am thus hedging about. It is all done for him. Who would not do all that he could for the dear Redeemer, dying Lamb, and for the blessed Father of our spirits? "Go work to-day in my vineyard."

Then what interesting work it is, for it is our own vineyard because it is our Father's vineyard. All that belongs to him belongs to us. We are sons working in our Father's vineyard; so we can say, "This vine; why, I have an interest in it, for I am the heir of my Father's property. This ground that I endeavour to dig about and manure; it is my ground, it is my Father's. And this wall that I try to mend; it is mine, it is my Father's." It is always pleasant to work for ourselves, you know; and, in a blessed sense, when we are working for God we are working for ourselves. Ye are labourers, ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's people; and when ye are working for the Lord ye really are taking shares with him.

And what a work it is, too! "Go work to-day in my vineyard." One likes working in a vineyard, because it pays. Working in a desert may be thankless toil; but working in a vineyard where there will be clusters is very different. One can think already of those juicy grapes that will be ready for the winepress, and for the festival, when the ruddy juice comes freely forth—when they make merry and joy in the vintage. And you will have the new wine, and the wine on the lees well refined. All sorts of pleasures await the man who serves the Lord.

"Go work in my vineyard." Does it not mean that the work is plentiful? There is always something to be done in a vineyard. If you ask those who keep vines they will tell you that there is much labour required. From one part of the year right on there is something still to be done, many dangers to be averted, and many enemies to be kept off from the vine; so there is plenty to do, brother. Go work in the vineyard, where there will be need of all thy hands. It is close at hand; hard by you; for the heavenly Father did not say, "Son, take a ship and go to Tarshish, or to Ophir." He said, "My son, go work in my vineyard"; and the vineyard was just out of the back door there. Now, your heavenly Father's vineyard is close to you. Those streets where you live—the very house in which you dwell—perhaps the very chamber in which you sleep—is God's vineyard, where you are to work for him. It is your heavenly Father's own work, to be done by you in your heavenly Father's own strength. Oh, if I might to-night set one young man on fire with love to Christ I should be glad. If I could but be the humble means of inspiring some Christian woman with the high mission of being useful in her day and generation, how much would my soul

rejoice! There came into this Tabernacle one evening a young gentleman who was well known as being a great hand with his cricket bat. He was a Christian and full of earnestness in laying hold upon the great truths of revelation; but he had never served his God. He thought it right to spend his leisure time in manly exercises, and in such pursuits he sought recreation. But while I spoke a fire kindled within him, and he went home to begin to preach the gospel in the street of the city where he lived, and now he is the pastor of a large and influential church which he has gathered together. Since then he has preached more than once in this place the gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, that some other believer who may happen to be in that condition—some young man of ability who is spending all his strength on the world without going into anything grossly wrong, but simply wasting his talent—might hear a voice saying to him to-night, as he goes down that aisle, "My son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

After dwelling so long upon the practical admonition, I have but little time left for that brief explanation of the parable, or more properly the parables of the vineyard with which on the outset I promised to close. The occasion on which they were spoken is memorable. Assailed "*while he was teaching*,"—rudely interrupted by the legal sanhedrim of the Jews with the high priest in the forefront, they confronted our Lord as it were with a warrant and propounded to him two questions;—one as to the authority or title by which he acted—the other as to the source from which his authority was derived. You all know how skilfully he evaded his unscrupulous antagonists. "*I also will ask you one thing*," he said. Therewith he put to them a question that proved a poser, and left them to a ridiculous parley, for "*they reasoned among themselves*," went aside to whisper, and then drew back in sheer timidity declining an answer, for "*they feared the people*," or as you may read it, they were afraid of the mob. The advantage our Lord thus gained he quickly followed up with a parable—in fact, with the parable we have been talking about. He opened it thus,—"*What think ye?*"—putting a query about two sons, the one forward in profession, yet utterly disobedient, the other sullen in appearance though afterwards penitent in spirit and diligent in labour. The thing was so obvious that they answer without hesitation with a reply that nailed the censure to their own breasts. "Whether of these twain did the will of his father?" They say unto him, "the first." Read it, read the parable for yourselves. Realize the force of it if you can. The penitent harlot and the obdurate high priest are put in the scales. "*In the way of righteousness*"—according to the truthful caricature—the chief priests and elders themselves admit that "*the first*" of these twain did the will of our heavenly Father. Digest this parable, I pray you. Almost without a break the *vineyard* supplied him yet again with another parable which he insisted on their hearing—a parable that brought out the character of the dispensation and "the signs of the times" so distinctly, that they could not fail to read it in the light of their own prophets, and at the same time it so exposed the treachery of their counsel and conspiracy that they recognized their own portrait at once and perceived that he spake of them. "The vineyard," you are all aware, was the constant symbol of the Jewish nation as a theocracy.

The men that sat in Moses's seat were the stewards in charge of that vineyard which was Jehovah's special property. They, like the perverse rulers of every age, sought to shelter their evil designs under cover of syndicates and conferences. But the words and warnings of Jesus, his proverbs and parables, were keen enough to probe all their subtleties, and leave them to stand abashed without an excuse for the guile of their hearts or the guilt of their conduct. Now remember that the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. To what nation is it given? Is it not to the church which is called "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"? The vine is the express symbol of our Christian life, as all believers are incorporated with Christ. Well then, there is a vineyard of God's own planting; you believe that. He has let it out to husbandmen; you believe that. He will come seeking fruit of this vineyard; you believe that. You are, dear brethren, the children of the husbandmen; you believe that, or else you would not presume to sit at his table and drink of his cup. He says therefore to you, "Son, go work in my vineyard." What answer do you give with your lips? What answer do you give with your life?

Thus far I have not been speaking to unconverted people. I have not said a word to them. To them, however, I have this word to say, and I have done. I shall not ask you to work for Christ. I cannot exhort you to do anything for him. You are not in a state of mind to do it. You must first believe in him. Oh, let it be a sorrow to you to-night that you are incapable of serving Christ. Till you get a new heart and a right spirit you have no capacity to serve him. You have first to trust Christ, and to prove in your own souls that this gospel is the power of God to your salvation. Your eyes must be opened; you must be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that you may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith in Jesus, before you can do anything for him. Then, not till then, will ye be meet to be made witnesses both of those things which ye shall have seen and of those things in the which he will hereafter appear unto you. You must be born again yourselves before ye can travail in birth for others, till Christ be formed in them. You cannot testify, those of you by whom the testimony of Christ has not been received and in whom it is not confirmed. Your unskilled labour would be mischievous. Hands off such holy work till those hands have been washed clean by Jesus Christ. Come ye unto him, and trust him, and believe in him, and when he has saved you, then he will say to you, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage"—Matthew xxii. 2, 3, 4.

If God grant me strength I hope to go through this parable, but at this present we shall confine our thoughts to the opening scene of the royal festival. Before, however, we proceed further, it is most fitting that we give expression to our deep gratitude, that it has pleased the infinite mind to stoop to our narrow capacities, and instruct us by parable. How tenderly condescending is God to devise similitudes, that his children may learn the mysteries of the kingdom! If it be sometimes marvelled at among men that great minds are ever ready to stoop, what a far greater marvel that God himself should bow the heavens and come down to meet our ignorance and slowness of comprehension! When the learned professor has been instructing his class in the hall in recondite matters of deep philosophy, and then goes home and takes his child upon his knee, and tries to bring down great truth to the grasp of his child's mind, then you see the great love of the man's heart: and when the eternal God, before whom seraphim are but insects of an hour, condescends to instruct our childishness and make us wise unto salvation, we may well say, "herein is love." Just as we give our children pictures that we may win the attention, and may by pleasing means fix truth upon their memories, so the Lord with loving inventiveness has become the author of many a charming metaphor, type, and allegory, by which he may gain our interest, and through his Holy Spirit enlighten our minds. If he who thunders till the mountains tremble, yet deigns to speak with us in a still small voice, let us gladly sit in Mary's place at his gracious feet, and willingly learn of him. O that God would give to each one a teachable spirit, for this is the greatest step towards understanding the mind of God. He who is willing to learn, in a childlike spirit, is already in a considerable measure taught of God. May we all so study this instructive parable

as to be quickened by it to all that is well-pleasing in the sight of God, for after all true learning in godliness may be judged of by its results upon our lives. If we are holier we are wiser, practical obedience to the will of the Lord Jesus is the surest evidence of an understanding heart.

In order to understand the parable before us we must first direct our attention to the design of the "certain king" here spoken of. He had *a grand object* in view; he desired to do honour to his son upon the occasion of his marriage. We shall then notice the very *generous method* by which he proposed to accomplish his purpose; he made a dinner, and bade many: there were other modes of honouring his son, but the great king elected the mode which would best display his bounty. We shall then observe, with sad interest, *the serious hindrance* which arose to the carrying out of *his* generous design—those who were bidden would not come. There was nothing to hinder the magnificence of the festival in the riches of the prince—he lavished out his stores for the feast; but here was a hindrance strange and difficult to remove, they would not come. Then our thoughts will linger admiringly over *the gracious rejoinder* which the king made to the opposers of his design; he sent other servants to repeat the invitation, "Come ye to the marriage." If we shall drink deep into the meaning of these three verses, we shall have more than enough for one meditation.

I. A certain king of wide dominions and great power designed to give a magnificent banquet, with a GRAND OBJECT in view. The crown prince, his well beloved heir, was about to take to himself a fair bride, and therefore the royal father desired to celebrate the event with extraordinary honours. From earth, look up to heaven. The great object of God the Father is to glorify his Son. It is his will "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." (John v. 23.) Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is glorious already *in his divine person*. He is ineffably blessed, and infinitely beyond needing honour. All the angels of God worship him, and his glory fills all heaven. He has appeared on the stage of action as *the Creator*, and as such his glory is perfect, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." He said, "Light be," and it flamed forth. He bade the mountains lift their heads, and their summits pierced the clouds. He created the water-floods, he bade them seek their channels, and he appointed their bounds. Nothing is lacking to the glory of the Word of God, who was in the begining with God, who spake and it was done, who commanded, and it stood forth. He is highly exalted also as *the preserver*, for he is before all things, and by him all things consist. He is that nail fastened in a sure place, upon which all things hang. The keys of heaven, and death, and hell, are fastened to his girdle, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful. He hath a name which is above every name, before which all things shall bow, in heaven, and earth, and under the earth. He is God over all. He is blessed for ever. To him that is, and was, and is to come, the universal song goeth up.

But there is another relation in which the Son of God has graciously been pleased to stand towards us. He has undertaken to be *a Saviour*,

in order that he might be *a bridegroom*. He had enough glory before, but in the greatness of his heart, he would magnify his compassion even above his power, and he therefore condescended to take into union with himself the nature of man, in order that he might redeem the beloved objects of his choice from the penalty due to their sins, and might enter into the nearest conceivable union with them. It is as Saviour that the Father seeks to honour the Son, and the gospel feast is not for the honour of his person merely, but for the honour of his person in this new, yet anciently purposed relationship. It is for the honour of Jesus as entering into spiritual union with his church, that the gospel is prepared as a royal entertainment.

Brethren, when I said that here was a grand occasion, it certainly is so in God's esteem, and it should be so in ours; we should delight to glorify the Son of God. To all loyal subjects in any realm, the marriage of one of the royal family is a matter of great interest, and it is usual and fitting to give expression to congratulations and sympathies by suitable rejoicings. In the instance before us the occasion calls for special joy from all the subjects of the great king of kings. For the occasion in itself is a subject for great delight and thankfulness to us *personally*. The marriage is with whom? With angels? He took not up angels. It is a marriage with our own nature, "he took up the seed of Abraham." Shall we not rejoice when heaven's great Lord is incarnate as a man, and stoops to redeem humanity from the ruin of the fall? Angels rejoice but they have no such share in the joy as we have. It is the highest personal joy to manhood that Jesus Christ who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, was made in the likeness of men that he might be one flesh with his chosen. Arise ye who slumber! If there was ever an occasion when ye should bestir your spirits and cry "wake up my glory, awake psaltery and harp" it is now, when Jesus comes to be affianced to his church, to make himself of one flesh with her, that he may redeem her, and afterwards exalt her to sit with him upon his throne. Here were abundant reasons why the invited guests should come with joyful steps, and count themselves thrice happy to be bidden to such a banquet. There is overwhelming reason why mankind should rejoice in the glorious gospel of Jesus and hasten to avail themselves of it.

Beside that we must consider the *royal descent* of the Bridegroom. Remember that Jesus Christ our Saviour is very God of very God. Are we asked to do him honour? It is right, for to whom else should honour be given? Surely we should glorify our Creator and Preserver! Wilful must be the disobedience which will not pay reverence to one so highly exalted and so worthy of all homage. It is heaven to serve such a Lord. His glory reacheth unto the clouds; let him be adored for ever and ever; O come let us worship and bow down, let us cheerfully obey those commands of God which aim at the honour of his Son.

Remember also the *person* of Immanuel, and you will desire his glory. This glorious Son, whose fame is to be spread abroad, is most certainly God—of that we have spoken, but he is also most assuredly man, our brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. Do we not delight to believe that he, tempted in all points as we are, has never yet submitted to be stained by sin? Never such a man as he, head of the race,

the second Adam, the everlasting Father—who among us would not do him reverence? Will we not seek his honour, seeing that now he lifts our race to be next to the throne of God.

Remember, too, his *character*. Was there ever such a life as his? I will not so much speak of his divine character, though that furnishes abundant reason for worship and adoration, but think of him even as a man. O beloved, what tenderness, what compassion, yet what holy boldness; what love for sinners, and yet what love for truth! Men who have not loved him have nevertheless admired him, and hearts in which we least expected to see such recognition of his excellencies have nevertheless been deeply affected as they have studied his life. We must praise him, for He is "chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." It were treason to be silent when the hour has come to speak of him who is peerless among men and matchless among angels. Clap, clap your hands at the thought of the marriage of the King's Son, for whom his bride hath made herself ready.

Think, too, of his *achievements*. We take into reckoning whenever we do honour to a prince all that he may have done for the nation over which he rules. What, then, has Jesus done for us? Rather let me say what has he not done? Upon his shoulders were laid our sins; he carried them into the wilderness, and they are gone for ever. Against him came forth our foes; he met them in shock of battle, and where are they now? They are cast into the depths of the sea. As for death itself, that last of foes, he has virtually overcome it, and ere long the weakest of us through him shall say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" He is the hero of heaven. He returned to his Father's throne amidst the acclamations of the universe. Do *we* not, for whom he fought, for whom he conquered, do *we* not desire to honour him? I feel I speak with bated breath upon a theme where all our powers of speech should be let loose. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him! Is it not the universal verdict of all who know him? Ought it not to be the cry of all the sons of men? East and west, and north and south, ought they not to ring the joy bells and hang out streamers on his marriage day, for joy of him? Is the King's Son to be married, is there a festival in his honour? O then let him be great, let him be glorious! Long live the King! Let the maidens go forth with their timbrels, and the sons of music make sweet melody—yea, let all creatures that have breath break forth with his praises. "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

II. Secondly, here is a GENEROUS METHOD of accomplishing the design. A king's son is to be honoured on the day of his marriage, in what way shall it be done? Barbarous nations have their great festivals, and alas, that men should have sunk so low; on such occasions rivers of human blood are made to flow. To this very day, on the borders of civilisation, there is found a wretched tyrant whose infernal customs, for I dare not call them by a less severe term, command the murder of hundreds of his fellow creatures in cold blood, on certain high days and festivals. Thus would the monster honour his son by acting like a fiend. No blood is poured forth to honour the Son of heaven's great King. I doubt not Jesus will have honour even in the destruction

of men if they reject his mercy, but it is not so that God elects to glorify his Son. Jesus the Saviour, on his wedding-day with manhood, is glorified by mercy, not by wrath. If blood be mentioned on such a day, it is his own by which he is glorified. The slaughter of mankind would bring no joy to him, he is meek and lowly, a lover of the sons of men. It has been the custom of most kings to signalise a princely wedding by levying a fresh tax, or demanding an increased subsidy from their subjects. In the case of the anticipated wedding of our beloved Queen's daughter, the dowry sought will be given with greater pleasure than upon any former occasion, and none of us would lift a whisper of complaint; but the parable shows that the King of kings deals with us not after the manner of man. He asks no dowry for his Son; he makes the marriage memorable not by demands but by gifts. Nothing is sought for from the people, but much is prepared for them, gifts are lavishly bestowed, and all that is requested of the subjects is, that they for awhile merge the subject in the more honourable character of the guest, and willingly come to the palace, not to labour or serve at the table, but to feast and to rejoice.

Observe, then, the generous method by which God honours Christ is set forth here under the form of a banquet. I noted Matthew Henry's way of describing the objects of a feast, and with the alliteration of the Puritans, he says, "A feast is for love and for laughter, for fulness and for fellowship." It is even so with the gospel. It is for *love;* in the gospel, sinner, you are invited to be reconciled to God, you are assured that God forgives your sins, ceases to be angry, and would have you reconciled to him through his Son. Thus love is established between God and the soul. Then it is for *laughter*, for happiness, for joy. Those who come to God in Christ Jesus, and believe in him, have their hearts filled with overflowing peace, which calm lake of peace often lifts up itself in waves of joy, which clap their hands in exultation.

It is not to sorrow but to joy that the great King invites his subjects, when he glorifies his Son Jesus. It is not that you may be distressed, but that you may be delighted that he bids you believe in the crucified Saviour and live. A feast, moreover, is for *fulness*. The hungry famished soul of man is satisfied with the blessings of grace. The gospel fills the whole capacity of our manhood. There is not a faculty of our nature which is not made to feel its need supplied when the soul accepts the provisions of mercy; our whole manhood is satisfied with good things and our youth is renewed like the eagles. "For I have satisfied the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul." To crown all, the gospel brings us into *fellowship* with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. In Christ Jesus we commune with the sacred Trinity. God becomes our Father, and reveals his paternal heart. Jesus manifests himself unto us as he doth not unto the world, and the communion of the Holy Ghost abides with us. Our fellowship is like that of Jonathan with David, or Jesus with John. We feast on the bread of heaven, and drink wines on the lees well refined. We are brought into the heavenly banqueting house where the secret of the Lord is revealed to us, and our heart pours itself out before the Lord. Very near is our communion with God; most intimate love and condescension does he show to us. What say you to this? Is there not

here a rich repast worthy of him who prepares it. Here all your capacious powers can wish, O sinner, shall be given to you; all you want for time and for eternity God prepares in the person of his dear Son, and bids you receive it without money and without price.

I have already told you that all the expense lies with him. It was a very sumptuous festival, there were oxen, and there were fatlings, but none of these were taken from the pastures, or stalls of the guests. The gospel is an expensive business; the very heart of Christ was drained to find the price for this great festival; but it costs the sinner nothing, nothing of money, nothing of merit, nothing of preparation. You may come as you are to the gospel feast, for the only wedding dress required is freely provided for you. Just as you are, you are bidden to believe in Jesus. You have nothing to do but to receive of his fulness, for to "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." You are not asked to contribute to the provision, but to be a feaster at the divine banquet of infinite compassion.

How *honourable*, too, is the gospel to those who receive it. An invitation to a regal marriage was a high honour to those who were bidden. I do not suppose that many of us are likely to be invited to the Princess's wedding, and, if we were, we should probably be greatly elated, for we should most of us feel it to be one of the great events of our lives. So was it with these people. A king's son is not married every day, and it is not everybody that is bidden to the monarch's entertainment. All their lives long they would say, "I was at his wedding, and saw all the splendour of the marriage festival." Probably some of them had never before enjoyed such a feast as the luxurious potentate had prepared for that day, and had never before been in such good company. My brethren, nothing so honours a man as for him to accept the gospel. While his faith honours Christ, Christ honours him. It is no mean thing to be a king's son, but those who come to the marriage feast of God's own Son shall become King's sons themselves—themselves participators in the glory of the great heir of all things. While I am speaking of this generous method my heart glows with sacred ardour, and my wonder rises that men do not come to the banquet of love which honours all its guests. When the banquet is so costly to the host, so free to the guests, and so honourable to all concerned, how is it that there should be found any so unwise as to refuse the favour. Surely here is an illustration of the folly of the unrenewed heart, and a proof of the deep depravity which sin has caused. If men turn their backs on Moses with his stony tables, I do not marvel, but to despise the loaded tables of grace, heaped up with oxen and fatlings—this is strange. To resist the justice of God is a crime, but to repel the generosity of heaven, what is this? We must invent a term of infamy with which to brand the base ingratitude. To resist God in majesty of terror is insanity but to spurn him in the majesty of his mercy is something more than madness. Sin reaches its climax when it resolves to starve sooner than owe anything to divine goodness. I feel I must anticipate the period for delivering my message, and as I have described to you the way in which God honours his Son, I must at once proclaim the invitation, and cry to you, "Come to the wedding feast. Come ye, and glorify Jesus

by accepting the provisions of grace. Your works will not honour him, if you set them up as a righteousness in competition with his righteousness. Not even your repentance can glorify him, if you think to make it a rival to his precious blood. Come, guilty sinner, as you are, and take the mercy Jesus freely presents to you, and accept the pardon which his blood secures to those who believe in him." Methinks when the messenger went out from the King and first of all marked signs of neglect among those who were bidden, and saw that they would not come, he must have been mute with astonishment. He had seen the oxen, and seen the fatlings, and all the goodly preparations, he knew the King, he knew his Son, he knew what joy it was to be at such a feast; and when the bidden ones began to turn their backs on him, and go their way to their farms, the messenger, repeated his message over and over again with eagerness, wondering all the while at the treason which dared insult so good a King. I think I see him, at first indignant for his Master's sake, and afterwards melted to pity as he saw what would surely come of such an extravagance of ingratitude, such a superfluity of insolence. He mourned that his fellow-citizens whom he loved should be such fools as to reject so good an offer, and spurn so blessed a proclamation. I, too, am tossed to and fro in soul, with mingled but vehement feelings. O, my God, thou hast provided the gospel, let none in this house reject it, and so slight thy Son and dishonour thee, but may all rejoice in thy generous way of glorifying Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of his church, and may they come, and willingly grace the festival of thy love.

III. We now advance to our third point, and regretfully remember THE SERIOUS HINDRANCE which for awhile interfered with the joyful event.

The king had thought in his mind, "I will make a great feast, I will invite a large number. They shall enjoy all my kingdom can afford, and I shall thus show how much I love my son, and moreover all the guests will have sweet memories in connection with his marriage." When his messengers went out to intimate to those who had received previously an express invitation that the time was come, it is written, "They would not come;" not they *could* not, but they "*would* not come." Some for one reason, some for another, but without exception they would not come. Here was a very serious hindrance to the grand business. Cannot the king drag his guests to the table? Yes, but then it would not accomplish his purpose. He wants not slaves to grace his throne. Persons compelled to sit at a marriage-feast would not adorn it. What credit could it be to a king to force his subjects to feast at his table? No, for once, as I have said before, the subject must be merged in the guest. It was essential to the dignity of the festival that the guests should come with cheerfulness to the festival,

but they would not come. Why? Why would they not come? The answer shall be such as to answer another question—Why do not you come and believe in Jesus! With many of them it was an indifference to the whole affair. They did not see what concern they had in the king or his son. Royal marriages were high things and concerned high people; they were plain-speaking men, farmers who went hedging and ditching, or tradesmen who made out bills and sold by the yard or pound. What cared they for the court, the palace, the king, the prince, his bride, or his dinner! They did not say quite that, but such was their feeling; it might be a fine thing, but it was altogether out of their line. How many run in the same groove at this hour? We have heard it said, "What has a working man to do with religion?" and we have heard others of another grade in life affirm that persons who are in business cannot afford time for religion, but had better mind the main chance. The Lord have mercy upon your folly! Here is one great obstacle to the gospel, the stolid indifference of the human mind concerning this grandest of all conceptions—God's glorifying his dear Son by having mercy upon sinners.

At the bottom the real reason for the refusal of those in the parable was that they were disloyal, they would not come to the supper because they saw an opportunity for the loyal to be glad, and not being loyal they did not wish to hear the songs and acclamations of others who were. By staying away they insulted the king, and declared that they cared not whether he was a king or not, whether his son was a prince or not. They determined to disavow their allegiance by refusing the invitation. They said in effect, "Anyhow, if he be a king and his son a prince, we will do him no honour, we will not be numbered with those who surround his board and show forth his splendour. No doubt a feast is worth having, and such a feast as there will be provided t'were well for us to participate in, but for once we will deny our appetites that we may indulge our pride. We proclaim a revolt. We declare we will not go." Ah, ye who believe not in Jesus, at the bottom of it your unbelief is enmity to your Maker, sedition against the great Ruler of the universe, who deserves your homage. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib," but ye know not, neither do ye consider; ye are rebels against the Majesty of heaven.

Moreover, the refusal was a slight to the prince as well as to his father, and in some cases the gospel is refused mainly with this intent, because the unbeliever rejects the deity of Christ, or despises his atonement. O sirs, beware of this, I know of no rock more fatal than to dishonour Christ by denying his sonship and his deity. Split not upon it, I beseech you—"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little." Indifference covered the refusal in the text, "they made light of it," but if you take off the

film you will see that at the bottom there was treason against the majesty of the king, and distaste to the dignity of his son.

No doubt some of them despised the feast itself. They must have known that with such a king it could not be a starveling meal, but they pretended to despise the feast. How many there are who despise the gospel which they do not understand, I say which they do not understand, for almost invariably if you hear a man depreciate the gospel, you will find that he has scarcely even read the New Testament and is a utter stranger to the doctrines of grace. Listen to a man who is voluble in condemnation of the gospel, and you may rest assured that he is loud because he is empty. If he understood the subject better he would find, if he were indeed a man of candour, that he would be led at least to be silent in admiration if he did not become loyal in acceptance.

Beloved friends, the feast is such as you greatly need, let me tell you what it is. It is pardon for the past, renewal of nature for the present, and glory for the future. Here is God to be our helper, his Son to be our shepherd, the Spirit to be our instructor. Here is the love of the Father to be our delight, the blood of the Son to be our cleansing, the energy of the Holy Spirit to be life from the dead to us. You cannot want anything that you ought to want, but what is provided in the gospel, and Jesus Christ will be glorified if you accept it by faith. But here is the hindrance, men do not accept it, "they would not come." Some of us thought that if we put the gospel in a clear light, and if we were earnest in stating it our hearers must be converted, and God forbid we should ever try to do otherwise than make it plain and be earnest, but for all that the best ministry that ever was, or ever could be, will be unsuccessful in a measure; yea, and altogether so, unless the effectual work of the Spirit be present. Still will the cry go up, "Who hath believed our report?" Still will those who serve their Master best, have reason to mourn that they sow on stony ground, and cast their bread on thankless waters. Even the prince of preachers had to say, "Ye search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but ye will not come to me that ye might have life." Alas, alas, that mercy should be rejected and heaven spurned.

IV. So now we must close with the most practical matter of consideration, THE GRACIOUS REJOINDER of the king to the impertinence which interfered with his plans. What did he say? You will observe that they had been bidden, and then called; after the Oriental custom, the call intimated that the festival was now approaching, so that they were not taken unawares, but knew what they did. The second invitation they rejected in cold blood, deliberately, and with intent. What did the monarch do? Set their city in a blaze, and at once root out the rebels? No, but in the first place, he winked at their former

insolent refusal. He said in himself, "Peradventure they mistook my servants, peradventure they did not understand that the hour was come. Perhaps the message that was delivered to them was too brief, and they missed its meaning. Or, if perchance, they have fallen into some temporary enmity against me, on reconsideration, they will wish that they had not been so rude, and ungenerous to me. What have I done that they should refuse my dinner? What has my son done that they should not be willing to honour him by feasting at my table. Men love feasting, my son deserves their honour—why should they not come? I will pass over the past and begin again." My hearers, there are many of you who have rejected Christ after many invitations, and this morning my Lord forgets your former unkindnesses, and sends me again with the same message, again to bid you "come to the wedding." It is no small patience which overlooks the past and perseveres in kindness, honestly desiring your good.

The King sent another invitation—"all things are ready, come ye to the marriage," but you will please to observe that he changed the messenger. "Again he sent forth other servants." Yes, and I will say it, for my soul feels it, if a change of messengers will win you, much as I love the task of speaking in my Master's name, I would gladly die now, where I am, that some other preacher might occupy this platform, if thereby you might be saved. I know my speech to some of you must be monotonous. I seek out images fresh and many, and try to vary my voice and manner, but for all that one man must grow stale to you when heard so often. Perhaps my modes are not the sort to touch your peculiarities of temperament—well, good Master, set thy servant aside, and consider him not. Send other messengers if perchance they may succeed. But to some of you I am another messenger, not a better, but another, since my brethren have failed with you. Oh, then, when my voice cries, "Come unto Jesus, trust in his atonement, believe in him, look to him and live;" let the new voice be successful, where former heralds have been disregarded.

You notice, too, that the message was a little changed. At first it was very short. Surely if men's hearts were right, short sermons would be enough. A very brief invitation might suffice if the heart were right, but since hearts are wrong God bids his servants enlarge, expand, and expound. "Come, for all things are ready. I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, all things are ready, come to the marriage." One of the best ways of bringing sinners to Christ is to explain the gospel to them. If we dwell upon its preparations, if we speak of its richness and freeness, some may be attracted whom the short message which merely tells the plan of salvation might not attract. To some it is enough to say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," for they are asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

but others need to be attracted to the wedding feast by the description of the sumptuousness of the repast. We must try to preach the gospel more fully to you, but we shall never tell you of all the richness of the grace of God. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his thoughts above your thoughts, and his ways above your ways. Forsake your sins and your thoughts and turn to the Lord, for he will abundantly pardon you. He will receive you to his heart of love, and give you the kiss of his affection at this hour, if, like prodigal children, you come back and seek your Father's face. The gospel is a river of love, it is a sea of love, it is a heaven of love, it is a universe of love, it is all love. Words there are none, fully to set forth the amazing love of God to sinners, no sin too big or too black, no crime too crimson or too cursed for pardon. If you do but look to his dear crucified Son all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven you. There is forgiveness. Jesus gives repentance and remission. And then the happiness which will be brought to you here and hereafter are equally beyond description. You shall have heaven on earth and heaven in heaven; God shall be your God, Christ shall be your friend, and eternal bliss shall be your portion.

In this last message the guests were pressed very delicately, but still in a way which if they had possessed any generosity of heart at all, must have touched them. You see how the evangelist puts it, he does not say, "Come, or else you will miss the feast; come, or else the king will be angry; come, come, or else you will be the losers." No, but he puts it, as I read it, in a very remarkable way. I venture to say—if I be wrong, the Master forgive me so saying—the king makes himself the object of sympathy, as though he were an embarrassed host. See here, "My dinner is ready, but there is no one to eat it; my oxen and fatlings are all killed, but there are no guests." "Come, come," he seems to say, "for I am a host without guests." So sometimes in the gospel you will see God speaks as if he would represent himself as getting an advantage by our being saved. Now we know that herein he condescends in love to speak after the manner of men. What can he gain by us? If we perish what is he the loser? But he makes himself often in the gospel to be like a father who yearns over his child, longing for him to come home. He makes himself, the infinite God, turn beggar to his own creatures, and beseeches them to be reconciled. Wondrous stoop; for, like a chapman who sells his wares, he cries, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, let him come." Do you observe how Christ, as he wept over Jerusalem, seems to weep for himself as well as for them. "How often would I have gathered thy children together." And God, in the prophets, puts it as his own sorrow, "How can I set thee as Admah, how can I make thee as Zeboim," as if it were not the child's loss alone, but the father's

loss also, if the sinner died. Do you not feel, as it were, a sympathy with God when you see his gospel rejected? Shall the cross be lifted high, and none look to it? Shall Jesus die, and men not be saved by his death? O blessed Lord, we feel, if nothing else should draw us, we must come when we see, as it were, thyself represented as a host under our embarrassment, for lack of guests. Great God, we come, we come right gladly, we come to participate of the bounties which thou hast provided, and to glorify Jesus Christ by receiving as needy sinners that which thy mercy has provided.

Brethren and sisters since Christ finds many loath to honour him, my exhortation is to you who love him, honour him the more since the world will not. You who have been constrained to come, remember to sing as you sit at his table, and rejoice and bless his name. Next go home and intercede for those who will not come, that the Lord will enlighten their understandings, and change their wills, that they may be yet constrained to believe in Jesus; and as for those of you who feel half inclined this morning by the soft touches of his grace to come and feast, let me bid you come. It is a glorious gospel—the feast is good. He is a glorious king—the Host is good. He is a blessed Saviour, he who is married, he is good. It is all good, and you shall be made good too, if your souls accept the invitation of the gospel which is given to you this day. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The Lord send his Spirit to make the call effectual, for his dear Son's sake. Amen.

Making Light of Christ

"But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise"—Matthew xxii. 5

MAN is not much changed since the days of Adam. In his bodily frame he appears to be exactly similar, for skeletons many hundred years' old are the exact counterparts of ours; and sure enough that which was recorded in history as having been done by man centuries ago, might be written again, for "there is nothing new under the sun." The same class of men is still to be discovered (although, perhaps, differently dressed) as that which existed ages long gone by. There are still men who answer the character given to others, in his day, by the Saviour, "They go their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise," making light of the glorious things of the gospel. I am certain I have many such characters here to-night, and I pray the Lord that I may be enabled to discourse to them very solemnly and very pointedly. And I must ask all you who understand the heavenly art of prayer, to pray that God would be pleased to send home every thought into the breast where he intends it to lodge, that it may bring forth the comfortable fruit of righteousness in the salvation of many souls. "They made light of it;" so do too many in this day; and so will a large portion of my hearers to-night. I believe that to think lightly of Christ is a sin; and at all risks of being falsely called legalist, or free-willer, by those who are wise above what is written, I shall charge it upon you as such, for I hope I shall never belong to that class of Calvinists who do the devil's work by excusing sinners in their sins.

In the first place, we shall have a few words with you, concerning *what it is that the sinner makes light of*; secondly, *how it is that he makes light of it*; and thirdly, *why it is that he makes light of it.* Then a general observation or two, and we shall not weary you.

I. In the first place, WHAT IS IT THAT THE SINNER MAKES LIGHT OF? According to the parable, the person alluded to made light of a marriage banquet which a king had provided, with all kinds of dainties, to which they were freely invited, and from which they wilfully absented themselves. The spiritual meaning of this is easy to discover. Sinners who make light of Christ express their contempt of a glorious banquet which God has provided at the marriage of his Son. This is solemn ground to tread upon. Oh! for the teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Taking this parable as the basis of our remarks, we may observe, first, that the sinner makes light of *the messenger who brings him the news that the marriage supper is prepared.* These men refused to come; they went—"One to his farm, another to his merchandise," and so made light of the messenger; and every sinner who neglects the great salvation of Jesus Christ, makes light of the gospel minister, which is no little insult in God's esteem. It is never reckoned a small offence by our great

nation, if our ambassador is treated with indifference; and take it for a truth, it is no light thing with God if you despise the ambassadors he sends to you. But this is comparatively little; the ambassadors are men like yourselves, who can well afford to be contemned, if that were all. In fact, we should be glad enough to forgive you if it were in our power to do so, and if this were all your guilt.

But these people *despised the feast.* Some of them fancied that the fatlings, and other provisions that would be upon the table, would be no better than what they had at home. They thought that the royal banquet would be no very great thing for which to give up their merchandise for a day, or to renounce their farming even for an hour. They scorned the banquet; at least, it appears so, because they did not go to it. Oh! sinner, when thou neglectest the great salvation, remember what thou dost despise; when thou makest light of God's gospel, thou makest light of justification by faith; thou makest light of washing in the blood of Jesus; thou makest light of the Holy Spirit; thou makest light of the road to heaven; and then thou makest light of faith, and hope, and love; thou makest light of all the promises of the eternal covenant, of all the glorious things that God has laid up for them that love him, and of everything which he hath revealed in his Word as being the promised gift to those who come unto him. It is a solemn thing to make light of the gospel, for in that Word, God's-spell—good tidings, is summed up all that human nature can require, and all that even the saints in bliss can receive. Oh! to despise the gospel of the blessed God, how mad! how worse than folly! Despise the stars, and thou art a fool; despise God's earth, with its glorious mountains, with its flowing rivers, and its fair meads, and thou art a maniac; but despise God's gospel, and thou art ten thousand maniacs in one. Make light of that, and thou art far more foolish than he who sees no light in the sun, who beholds no fairness in the moon, and no brilliancy in the starry firmament. Trample, if you please, his lower works; but oh! remember, when you make light of the gospel, you are making light of the masterpiece of your great Creator—that which cost him more than to create a myriad worlds—the bloody purchase of our Saviour's agonies.

And, again, these people *made light of the King's Son.* It was *his* marriage, and inasmuch as they absented themselves, they did dishonour to that glorious One in whose honour the supper was prepared. They slighted him whom his Father loved. Ah! sinner, when thou makest light of the gospel, thou makest light of Christ—of that Christ before whom glorious cherubs bow themselves—of that Christ at whose feet the high archangel thinks it happiness to cast his crown; thou makest light of him with whose praise the vault of heaven rings; thou makest light of him whom God makes much of, for he has called him, "God over all, blessed for ever." Ah! it is a solemn thing to make light of Christ. Despise a prince, and ye shall have little honour at the king's hand for it; but despise the Son of God, and the Father will have vengeance on you for his slighted Son. Oh! my dear friends, it seems to me to be a sin, not unpardonable, I know, but still most heinous, that men should ever despise my blessed Lord Jesus Christ and treat him with cruel scorn. Make light of thee, sweet Jesus! Oh! when I see thee with thy shirt of gore, wrestling in Gethsemane, I bow myself o'er thee, and I say, "O, Redeemer, bleeding for sin, can any sinner make light of thee?" When I behold him with a river of blood rolling down his shoulder, beneath the cursed flagellation of Pilate's whip, I ask, "Can a sinner make light of such a Saviour as this?" And when I see him yonder, covered with his blood, nailed to a tree, expiring in torture, shrieking, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," I ask myself, "Can any make light of this?" Ay, if they do, then, indeed, it were sin enough to damn them, if they have no other sin—that they have lightly esteemed the Prince of Peace, who is glorious and altogether lovely. Oh! my friend, if thou makest light of Christ, thou hast insulted the only one who can save thee—the only one who can bear thee across the Jordan—the only one who can unbolt the gates of heaven, and give thee welcome. Let no preacher of smooth things persuade thee that this is not crime. O, sinner, think of thy sin, if thou art making light of him, for then art thou making light of the King's only Son.

And yet, again, these people *made light also of the King* who had prepared the banquet. Ah! little dost thou know, O sinner, when thou dost trifle with the gospel, that thou art insulting God. I have heard some say, "Sir, I do not believe in Christ, but still I am sure I try to reverence God; I do not care about the gospel, I do not wish to be washed in Jesu's blood, nor to be saved in free grace fashion; but

I do not despise God; I am a natural religionist!" Nay, sir, but thou dost insult the Almighty, inasmuch as thou dost deny his Son. Despise a man's offspring, and thou hast insulted the man himself; reject the only begotten Son of God, and thou hast rejected the eternal one himself. There is no such thing as true natural religion apart from Christ; it is a lie and a falsehood; it is the refuge of a man who is not brave enough to say he hates God, but it is only a refuge of lies; for he who denieth Christ in that act offendeth God, and shutteth up heaven's gates against himself. There is no loving the Father except through the Son; and there is no acceptable worship of the Father, except through the Great High Priest the Mediator, Jesus Christ. Oh! my friend, remember, thou hast not merely despised the gospel, but thou hast despised the gospel's God. In laughing at the doctrines of revelation, thou hast laughed at God; in reviling the truth of the gospel, thou hast reviled God himself; thou hast bent thy fist in the face of the Eternal; thine oaths have not fallen upon the church, they have fallen upon God himself. Oh! remember, ye that mock at the message of Christ! Oh! remember, ye that turn away from the ministry of truth! God is a mighty one; how severely *can* he punish! God is a jealous God: oh! how severely *will* he punish! Make light of God, sinner? Why, this above all things is a damning sin, and in committing it, it may be thou wilt one day sign thine own death-warrant; for making light of God, of Christ, and of his holy gospel, is destroying one's own soul, and rushing headlong to perdition. Ah! unhappy souls, most unhappy must ye be, if ye live and die making light of Christ, and preferring your farms and your merchandise to the treaures of the gospel.

Again: bethink thee, my poor, pitiable friend, in that thou makest light of all the things I have mentioned, *thou art making light of the great solemnities of eternity.* The man who lightly esteems the gospel makes light of hell; he thinks its fires are not hot, and its flames not such as Christ has described them; he makes light of the burning tears that scald despairing cheeks for ever; he makes light of the yells and shrieks that must be the doleful songs and terrible music of perishing souls. Ah! it is no wise thing to make light of hell.

Consider again: thou makest light of heaven—that place to which the blest ones long to go, where glory reigns without a cloud, and bliss without a sigh. Thou puttest the crown of everlasting life beneath thy feet; thou treadest the palm-branch beneath thine unhallowed foot and thou thinkest it little to be saved, and little to be glorified. "Ah! poor soul, when thou art once in hell, and when the iron key is turned for ever in the lock of inevitable destiny, thou wilt find hell to be a something not so easy to despise; and when thou hast lost heaven and all its bliss, and canst only hear the song of the blessed, sounding faintly in the distance, increasing thy misery by contrast with their joy, then thou wilt find it no little thing to have made light of heaven. Every man who makes light of religion makes light of these things. He misjudges the value of his own soul, and the importance of its eternal state.

This is what men make light of. "Oh! sir," says one, "I never indulge in any words hostile to God's truth, I never laugh at the minister, nor do I despise the Sabbath." Stop, my friend, I will acquit thee of all that; and yet I will solemnly lay to thy charge this great sin of making light of the gospel. Hear me then!

II. How is it that men make light of it?

In the first place, it is making light of the gospel and of the whole of God's glorious things, *when men go to hear and yet do not attend.* How many frequent churches and chapels to indulge in a comfortable nap! Think what a fearful insult that is to the King of heaven. Would they enter into Her Majesty's palace, ask an audience, and then go to sleep before her face? And yet the sin of sleeping in Her Majesty's presence, would not be so great, even against her laws, as the sin of wilfully slumbering in God's sanctuary. How many go to our houses of worship who do not sleep, but who sit with vacant stare, listening as they would to a man who could not play a lively tune upon a good instrument. What goeth in at one ear goeth out at another. Whatever entereth the brain goeth out without ever affecting the heart. Ah, my hearers, you are guilty of making light of God's gospel, when you sit under a sermon without attending to it! Oh! what would lost souls give to hear another sermon! What would yonder dying wretch who is just now nearing the grave, give for another Sabbath! And what will you give, one of these days, when you shall be hard by Jordan's brink, that you might have

one more warning, and listen once more to the wooing voice of God's minister! We make light of the gospel when we hear it, without solemn and awful attention to it.

But some say they *do* attend. Well, it is possible to attend to the gospel, and yet to make light af it. I have seen some men weep beneath a powerful sermon; I have marked the tears chase each other—tears, blessed tell-tales of emotions within. I have sometimes said to myself, it is marvellous to see these people weep under some telling word from God, which is alarming them, as if Sinai itself were thundering in their ears. But there is something more marvellous than men's weeping under the word. It is the fact that they soon, too soon, wipe all their tears away. But ah! my dear hearer, recollect that if thou hearest of these things and shakest off a solemn impression, thou art, in doing that, slighting God and making light of his truth; and take heed how you do that, lest your own garments be red with the blood of your soul, and it be said, "Oh, Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

But there are others who make light of it in a different fashion. They hear the word and attend to it; but, alas! *they attend to something else with it.*

Oh! my hearer, thou makest light of Christ, if thou puttest him anywhere save in the centre of thine heart. He who gives Christ a little of his affections, makes light of Christ; for Christ will have the whole heart or none at all. He who gives Christ a portion, and the world a portion, despises Christ, for he seems to think that Christ does not deserve to have the whole. And inasmuch as he says that, or thinks that, he hath mean and unholy thoughts of Christ. Oh! carnal man, thou who art half religious, and half profane; thou who art sometimes serious, but as often frivolous; sometimes apparently pious, but yet so often unholy, thou makest light of Christ. And ye who weep on the Sunday, and then go back to your sins on the Monday; ye who set the world and its pleasures before Christ, ye think less of him than he deserves; and what is that but to make light of him? Oh! I charge you, ask yourself, my hearer this night, art not thou the man? dost not thou thyself make light of Christ? The self-righteous man who sets himself up as a partner with Christ in the matter of salvation, notwithstanding all his trumpery good works, is such a ringleader among despisers, that I would gibbet him in the very middle of them, and bid all like him tremble, lest they also be found slighters of Jesus.

He makes light of Christ, again, *who makes a profession of religion, and yet does not live up to it.* Ah! church members, ye want a great deal of sifting; we have an immense quantity of chaff now mixed with the wheat; and sometimes I think we have something worse than that. We have some in our churches that are not so good as chaff, for they do not seem to have been near the wheat at all; they are nothing better than tares. They have come into our churches, just as they would into a trade-association, because they think it will improve their business. It gives respectability to their name to take the sacrament; it makes them esteemed to have been baptized, or to be a member of a Christian church; and so they come in by shoals after the loaves and fishes, but not after Jesus Christ. Ah! hypocrite, thou makest light of Christ if thou thinkest that he is a stalkinghorse to get thee wealth. If thou dreamest that thou art to saddle and bridle Christ, and ride to wealth upon him, thou makest a grand mistake, for he was never meant to carry men anywhere except to heaven. If you suppose that religion was intended to gild your homes, to carpet your floors, and line your purses, you have greatly erred. It was intended to be profitable to the soul; and he who thinks to use religion to his own personal advantage thinks lightly of Christ: and at the last day this crime shall be laid to his charge—that he has made light of it;" and the King shall send his armies to cut him in pieces, among those who have despised his Majesty, and would not obey his laws.

III. And now, in the third place, I will tell you WHY THEY MADE LIGHT OF IT. They did so from different reasons.

Some of them made light of it *because they were ignorant;* they did not know how good the feast was; they did not know how gracious the king was; they did not know how fair the Prince was, or else they might have thought differently. Now, there are many present to-night, I dare say, who think lightly of the gospel, because they do not understand it. I have often heard people laugh at religion; but ask them what it is, and they know no more about religion than a horse, and worse than that, for they believe untruths about it, and a horse does not do that. They laugh at it, simply because they do not comprehend it; it is a thing beyond

them. We have heard of a foolish man who, whenever he heard a piece of Latin mentioned, laughed at it, because he thought it was a joke, at any rate it was a very outlandish way of talking—and so he laughed. So it is with many when they hear the gospel; they do not know what it is, and so they laugh at it. "Oh!" they say, "the man is mad." But why is he mad? Because you do not understand him. Are you so conceited as to suppose that all wisdom and all learning must rest with you? I would hint to you that the madness is on the other side. And though you may say of him, "Much learning hath made thee mad;" we would reply, "It is quite as easy to be made mad with none at all." And those who have none, and especially those who have no knowledge of Christ, are the most likely to despise him. Well did Watts say—

> "His worth, if all the nations knew,
> Sure, the whole earth would love him too."

Oh! dear friends, if you once knew what a blessed master Christ is, if you once knew what a blessed thing the gospel is, if you could once be brought to believe what a blessed God our God is, if you could only have one hour's enjoyment such as the Christian experiences, if you could only have one promise applied to your heart, you would never make light of the gospel again. Oh! you say you do not like it! Why, you have never tried it? Should a man despise the wine of which he has never sipped. It may be sweeter than he dreams? Oh! taste and see that the Lord is good; and so sure as ever you taste, you will see his goodness. I will venture to say, again, that there are many who make light of the gospel, simply through ignorance; and if that is so, I am somewhat in hopes that when they are a little enlightened by sitting under the Word, the Lord may be pleased graciously to bring them to himself; and then I know they will never make light of Christ again. Oh! do not be ignorant, "for that the soul be without knowledge is not good." Seek to know him, whom to know aright is life eternal; and when you know him you will never make light of him.

Other people make light of it *because of pride.* "What is the good," said one, "of bringing me that invitation? Step into my house, my man, I will show you a feast quite as good as any you can tell me of. Look here! there is good cheer for you; my table is as well spread as any man's; begging his Majesty's pardon, the King cannot give a better feast than I; and I do not see why I should drag my bones about to get nothing better than I can get at home." So he would not go, out of pride. And so with some of you. *You* want to be washed! No, you were never filthy; were you? *You* need to be forgiven! Oh no! you are rather too good for that. Why, you are so awfully pious in your own conceit, that if it were all true, you would make even the angel Gabriel blush to think of you. You do not think even an angel capable of holding a candle to you. What! you seek for mercy? It is an insult to you. "Go and tell the drunkard," you say, "go and fetch the harlot; but I am a respectable man; I always go to church or chapel; I am a very good sort of fellow; I may frolic now and then, but I make it up some other day; I am sometimes a little slack, but then I rein the horses in, and make up the distance afterwards; and I dare say I shall get to heaven as soon as anybody else. I am a very good sort." Well, my friend, I do not wonder that you despise the gospel, for the gospel just tells you that you are entirely lost. It tells you that your very righteousness is full of sin. That, as for any hope of your being saved by it, you might as well try to sail across the Atlantic on a sere leaf as try to get to heaven by your righteousness. And as for it being a garment fit to cover you, you might as well get a spider's web to go to court in, and think it a dress fit to appear in before her Majesty. Ah! my hearer, I know why thou despisest Christ; it is because of thy Satanic pride. May the Lord pull the pride out of thee; for if he do not, it will be the faggot that shall roast thy soul for ever. Take heed of pride; by pride fell the angels—how can men, then, though the image of their Maker, hope to win by it? Shun it, flee from it; for so sure as thou art proud, wilt thou incur the guilt of making light of Christ.

Perhaps quite as many made light of the good news, because *they did not believe the messenger.* "Oh!" said they, "stop a moment. What! a dinner to be given away? I do not believe it. What! the young Prince going to be married? Tell

that to fools, we do not believe any such thing. What! we all invited? We do not believe it; the story is incredible." The poor messenger went home and told his Master that they would not believe him. That is just another reason why many men make light of the gospel, because they do not believe it. "What!" they say, "Jesus Christ died to wash men from their sins? We do not believe it. What! A heaven. Who ever saw it? A hell! Who ever heard its groans? What! Eternity. Who ever returned from that last hope of every spirit. What! Blessedness in religion? We do not believe it—it is a moping, miserable thing. What! Sweetness in the promises? No there is not; we believe there is sweetness in the world, but we do not believe there is any in the wells the Lord has digged." And so they despise the gospel, because they do not believe it. But, I am sure, that when a man once believes it, he never thinks lightly of it. Once let me have the solemn conviction in my heart by the Holy Spirit, that if unsaved, there is a gaping gulf that shall devour me; do you think I can go to rest till I have trembled from head to foot? Once let me heartily believe that there is a heaven provided for those who believe on Christ, do you think I could give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids, till I have wept because it is not mine? I believe not. But damnable unbelief thrusts his hand into the mouth of man, and plucks up his heart, and so destroys him, for it will not let him believe, and, therefore, he cannot feel, because he believeth not. Oh! my friends, it is unbelief that makes men think lightly of Christ; but unbelief will not do so by-and-bye. There are no infidels in hell: they are all believers there. There are many that were infidels here, but they are not so now; the flames are too hot to make them doubt their existence. It is hard for a man, tormented in the flame, to doubt the existence of the fire. It would be difficult for a man, standing before the burning eyes of a God, to doubt the existence of a God after that. Ah! unbelievers, turn ye, or rather, may the Lord turn you from your unbelief, for this makes you think lightly of Christ; and this it is that is taking away your life, and destroying your souls.

Another set of people thought lightly of this feast *because they were so worldly*; they had so much to do. I have heard of a rich merchant who was waited on one day by a godly man, and when he stopped him, he said to him, "Well, sir, what is the state of your soul?" "Soul!" he said, "bother you, I have no time to take care of my soul; I have enough to do to take care of my ships." About a week after, it so happened that he had to find time to die, for God took him away. We fear he said to him, "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast hoarded up for thyself?" Ye merchants of London, there are many of you who read your ledgers more than your Bibles. Perhaps you must, but ye do not read your Bibles at all, while ye read your ledgers every day. In America, it is said, they worship the almighty dollar; I believe that in London many men worship the almighty sovereign; they have the greatest possible respect for an almighty bank note; that is the god which many men are always adoring. The prayer-book they carry so religiously in their hands is their cash-book. Even on Sunday, there is a gentleman over there, he does not think his foreman knows it, but he was sitting in doors all this morning, because it was wet, casting up his accounts; and now he comes here in the evening, because he is a very pious man—extraordinarily so. He would shut the parks up on a Sunday, he would—he would not let a soul get a breath of fresh air, because he is so pious, but he himself may sit half-a-day in the counting-house and yet think it no sin. But many are too busy to think of these things. "Pray!" they say, "I have no time for that; I have to pay. What! read the Bible? No I cannot; I have to be looking over this thing and that thing, and seeing how the markets go. I find time to read the *Times*, but I could not think of reading the Bible," It will be marvellously unfortunate for some of you, that you will find the lease of your lives rather shorter than you expected. If you had taken a lease of your lives for eighty-eight years from this date, you would be foolish enough, perhaps, to spend forty-four in sin. But considering that you are a tenant at will, and liable to be turned out any day, it is the height of folly, the very climax of absurdity, excelling all that the fool, with his cap and bells, ever did, to be living just to gather up the pelf of this world, and not for things to come. Worldliness is a demon that hath wrung the neck of many souls; God grant that we may not perish through our worldliness!

There is another class of people that I can only characterize in this way: *they are*

altogether thoughtless. If you ask them concerning religion, they have no opinion at all about it. They do not positively detest it, they do not mock at it; but they have not a thought about it. The fact of it is, they intend thinking about it by-and-bye. Theirs is a kind of butterfly existence; they are always moving about, never doing anything, neither for others or themselves. And these are very amiable people, who are always ready to give a guinea for a charity; they never refuse anybody, and they would give their guinea all the same, whether it was for a cricket match or a church. Now, if I were forced to go back to the world, and had to choose the character I would wish to be, the last position I would wish to occupy would be that of the thoughtless man. I believe thoughtless persons are in the most danger of being lost of any class I know. I like, sometimes to get under the word a thoroughly stout, stiff, hater of the gospel, for his heart is like a flint, and when it is struck with the hammer of the gospel the flint goes to pieces in a moment. But these thoughtless people have india-rubber hearts—you hit them, and they give way; you strike them again, and they give way. If they are sick, and you visit them, they say "yes." You talk to them about the importance of religion; they say "yes." You talk to them about escaping from hell and entering heaven, they say "yes." You preach a sermon to them when they are better, and remind them of the vows they made in their sickness; "it is quite right, sir," they say. And they say the same whatever you may tell them. They are always very polite to you; but whatever you say to them is put aside. If you begin talking to them about drunkards; oh! they are not drunkards; they may have accidently got drunk once, but that was a little thing out of the usual way. And bring whatever sin you like to them, you may hit them, and hit them, but it is no good, for they are not half so easily broken (speaking after the manner of men) as the real stout-hearted hater of the gospel. Why, there is a sailor comes rolling home from sea, swearing, blaspheming, cursing; he comes into the house of God, and almost the first word is applied by the Spirit for the breaking of Jack's heart. Another young man says, "I know as much as any minister can tell me; for my own mother taught me, and my old father used to read the Bible for me till, I believe, I have got every bit of it in my head. I go to chapel out of respect to his memory, but I really don't care at all about it; it is very good for old people, it is quite right for old women, and those who are dying, and in time of cholera. It is a very good thing, but I don't care anything about it just now." Now, I tell you, careless people, most solemnly, that you are the very devil's lifeguards; you are his reserve; he keeps you away from the battle; he does not send you out like he does a blasphemer, for he fears that a shot may haply light upon you, and you may be saved. But he says, "Stand by here, and if you have to go out I will give you an inpenetrable coat of mail." The arrows go rattling against you: they all hit you; but alas! there is not one of them that penetrates your heart, for that is left elsewhere. You are only an empty chrysalis, and when you come to God's house, and his word is preached, you make light of it, because it is your habit to be thoughtless about everything.

Very briefly I must touch another case, and then I must dismiss you. You may make light of the gospel *out of sheer presumption.* They are like the foolish man who goes on, and is punished; not like the prudent man, who "forseeth the evil, and hideth himself." They go on; that step is safe—they take it; the next step is safe—they take it; their foot hangs over a gulf of darkness; but they will try one step, and as that is safe, they think they will try the next; and as the last has been safe, and as for many years they have been safe, they suppose they always shall be; and because they have not died yet, they think they will never die. And so out of sheer presumption, thinking "all men mortal but themselves," they go on making light of Christ. Tremble, ye presumptuous, you will not always be able to do that.

And, lastly, I fear there are a great many who make light of Christ *because of the commonness of the gospel.* It is preached everywhere, and that is why you make light of it. You can hear it at the corner of every street; you can read it in this widely circulated Bible; and because the gospel is so common, therefore, you don't care for it. Ah! my dear friends, if there were only one gospel minister in London that could tell you the truth; if there were only one Bible in London, I believe you would be rushing to hear that Bible read; and the man who had the message would

have no sinecure of it, he would be obliged to work from morning to night, to tell it out to you. But now, because you have so many Bibles you forget to read them; because you have so many tracts you pack up any article in them; because you have so many sermons you do not think anything at all of them. But why is that? Dost thou think the less of the sun because he scatters his beams abroad? Dost thou think the less of bread because it is the food which God gives to all his children? Dost thou think the less of water, when thou art thirsty, because every rill will afford it to thee? No. If thou wert athirst after Christ, thou wouldst love him all the better, because he is preached everywhere; and thou wouldst not think lightly of him because of that.

"They made light of it." How many of my hearers to-night, I ask again, are making light of Christ? Many of you are, no doubt. I will give you, then, just one warning, and then farewell. Make light of Christ, sinner! let me say, again, to thee, and thou wilt rue the day, when thou comest on thy death-bed. It will go hard with thee when the bony monster has got the grip of thee, and when he is bringing thee down the river, to steep thee in the lake of death. It will go hard with thee, when thy eye-strings break, and when thy death-sweat stands upon thy brow. Remember, last time thou hadst a fever; ah! how thou didst shake. Remember, last night, how thou didst quake in thy bed, when flash after flash of lightning came through thy window; and how thou didst tremble when the deep-mouthed thunder spake out the voice of God. Ah! sinner, thou wilt tremble worse then when thou shalt see death for thyself, and when the bony rider, on his white horse, shall grasp his dart and plunge it in thy bowels. It will go hard with thee then, if thou hast no Christ to shelter thee, no blood wherein to wash thy soul! Remember, moreover, after death cometh the judgment. It will go hard with thee if thou hast despised Christ, and shalt die a despiser. See that flying angel? his wings are made of flame, and in his hand he grasps a sharp two-edged sword. O angel, wherefore dost thou wing thy speedy flight? "Hark!" says he, "this trump shall tell you." And he puts a trumpet to his lips, and

> "Blows a blast so loud and dread,
> Ne er were prophetic sounds so full of woe."

Look! the sheeted dead have started from their graves. Behold, the cloudy chariot is wheeled along by cherub's hand. Mark! there upon the throne there sits the King—the Prince. O angel, what in this terrible day must become of the man that has thought lightly of Christ? See there, he unsheathes his sword. "This blade," says he, "shall find and pierce him through. This blade, like a sickle, shall reap each tare from the wheat, and this strong arm shall bind him up in his bundle to be burned; and this great arm of mine shall grasp him, and hurl him down, down, down, where flames for ever burn, and hell for ever howls." It will go hard with you then. Mark this man's word to-night; go away and laugh at it; but remember, I say to you again, it will be a solemn thing for you when Christ shall come to judgment, if you have made light of him, and worse than all, if you should ever be locked up in the caverns of despair, if you should ever hear it said, "Depart ye cursed," if you should ever mingle your awful shrieks with the doleful howls of lost myriads, if you should see the pit that is bottomless, and the gulf that has walls of fire. It will be a fearful thing to find thyself in there, and to know that thou canst ne'er get out again! Sinner, this night I preach the gospel to thee. E'er thou goest, hear it, and believe it; may God grant thee grace to receive it, so thou shalt be saved. "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved. He that believeth not," so saith the Scripture, "shall be damned." To believe, is to put your trust in Christ; to be baptized, is to be plunged in water in the name of the Lord Jesus, as a profession that you are already saved, and that you love Christ. "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." O may you never know the meaning of that last word. Farewell!

"The Wedding Was Furnished with Guests"

"The wedding was furnished with guests"—Matthew xxii. 10.

Our discourse will follow the lines of the parable. A king desired to honour his son right royally. He loved his son well, for he deserved richly of him; and therefore, as the most fitting time had come, he resolved to honour him. His son was about to take to himself a spouse; should not his marriage, which is a great event in life, be celebrated with honour? The father determined to honour his son on the joyful occasion by inviting a large number of guests to a sumptuous banquet. Not by the infliction of pain, or the pressure of taxation, but by liberality and festivity, would the king honour the Crown Prince. It should be an extraordinary feast. Surely, it would be the simplest thing in the world to gather together a grateful company of guests. One would expect a competition for admission; everybody in the royal domain would eagerly ask for an invitation. But it fell out otherwise; there was a disloyal feeling abroad, and it now expressed itself; those who were bidden would not come, and means had to be used to secure the result spoken of in the text, so that "the wedding was furnished with guests."

The parable is plain. The great Father delights to honour Jesus, his Only-begotten Son. The Father loves the Son, with whom he is one. The Son has deserved well at the Father's hands, for he has been "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." It is the Father's aim in the work of grace to glorify his Son, who, as God and man in one nature, is the channel of grace to fallen men. He proposes to do this now that the Lord Jesus takes his church into marriage union with himself. The incarnate God calls a chosen company, the bride, the Lamb's wife, and celebrates thus early in the day this happy union by a wedding breakfast, to which he invites multitudes to come. It is a feast of mercy, grace, and peace; a marriage feast of delight and joy. The feast is for the glorifying of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very special manner. Can any of us measure the glory which comes to our Lord Jesus by his union with the church? Angels, and principalities, and powers, intelligences

now existing, and all intelligences yet to be created, will wonderingly gaze upon the riches of his inheritance in the saints. What a spectacle is this! The Word made flesh that he might dwell among us! Immanuel, God with us, taking unto himself a company of chosen men, to be one with him for ever. In the union of Christ and his church all wisdom centres, all grace shines forth. "The excellency of our God" is to be seen in the salvation of the elect and the joining of them unto the Christ. Our glorious Second Adam was like the first Adam in the garden, for whom no helpmeet was found. Neither cherubim nor seraphim, angels nor spirits, could be fit companions for him. He says, "My delights were with the sons of men." He willed that his chosen church should stand to him in the same relation as Eve stood to Adam, to be the solace of his heart and the rest of his love. He chose men to be his companions, his friends, his joy, his crown.

One would have thought that every man hearing that manhood was thus to be honoured by union with Godhead would flock towards the marriage-feast. It would have seemed certain that all would desire to know this heavenly mystery, and as soon as they knew it would press forward to be partakers in its bliss. Alas! this is not the case; and this morning my business is to tell you the story of how the purpose of divine love appeared in peril, but how, in the end, it is accomplished; and, according to the language of the text, "the wedding was furnished with guests."

I. Our first point is, that IT SEEMED AS IF NONE WOULD COME. The wedding-feast was prepared: oxen and fatlings were killed, all things were ready; but where were the guests?

Those first invited, and naturally expected, would not come. Previous notice had been given them of the festival, and afterwards a summons had been sent to say that the hour was come; but, instead of joyfully responding, they would not come.

These were, first of all, the Jews, to whom the gospel had been given by the law and the prophets long beforehand. "He came unto his own, but his own received him not." Israel was not gathered: few out of the chosen nation recognized the Messiah. He came with a feast of mercy for them, but they would have none of it. He called, and they refused.

To-day this same class will be found among the children of godly parents; dedicated from their birth, prayed for by loving piety, listening to the gospel from their childhood, and yet unsaved. We look for these to come to Jesus. We naturally hope that they will feast upon the provisions of grace, and like their parents will rejoice in Christ Jesus; but, alas! how often it is the case they will not come! Some such are here this morning. We greatly grieve over you. You do not choose your father's God, nor accept your mother's Saviour. Ah me! if *you* will not come, who will? If you, who are taught concerning salvation by grace, yet refuse it, how can we wonder that the children of the godless and the profane reject our message? Who will come if you will not?

Dear hearers, some of you are not privileged with godly parents, but you have been for many years willing listeners to the Word of life,

and yet you do not accept Christ Jesus as yours, nor accept the provisions of his grace. You do not joy with him in his union with his chosen, for you do not love him. How sad is this! Well may the dispirited preacher mourn, and fear in his heart that the great festival of love will prove a failure! If such as you are will not come, how will the wedding be furnished with guests?

The outlook grew worse still when *they came not though they were reasoned with.* When they would not come, the king sent other servants to bring them to a better mind; and this was the form of his reasoning: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." No kinder argument could have been used: there was an appeal to all that was noble in them, and had they been worthy they would have come at once. I can well understand that the servants would repeat their lord's message with special eagerness, as they thought of his waiting in the palace, and watching for the guests. They would cry to those who hesitated, "You have waited long enough, come at once. The marriage cannot be delayed, why should *you* delay? Tarry no longer. To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts." Still they made light of it. When you have been invited to Jesus many a time; when tearful earnestness has pleaded with you, and yet men of God have had to return to their Master, saying, "Who hath believed our report?" it becomes a sorrowful business, and our anxious fears cannot see how the wedding will be furnished with guests. This would have been an overwhelming surprise to us if Jesus had not declared of men in his own day, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." If they refused his pleadings we cannot wonder that they reject our sayings. Still it is a mournful fact, that "Many are called, but few chosen."

The case looks darker still when we notice that, *though reasoned with by new messengers, they did not come.* It is said, "He sent forth other servants." I tell you from my very soul that, if my Lord will only bring you to the banquet of his grace, I mind not who shall be the successful messenger. If you will not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life through what I have to say, may the Lord remove me, and send some one else, to whom he will give power by his grace to reach your hearts. I shall be glad to remain in this pulpit for years to come, but not at the cost of a single soul. If somebody else can preach to you more efficiently, if some one else can get at your hearts better than I have done, may the Lord allow me to retire for your good! Do you wish it? "He sent other servants." A preacher may be too rhetorical: let a plain-speaking person be tried. He may be too weighty: let another come with parable and anecdote. Alas! with some of you the thing wanted is not a new voice, but a new heart. You would listen no better to a new messenger than to the old one. After so many good men and true have spoken; after Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas have all failed, how shall the wedding be furnished with guests?

If you look at *the various characters who would not come,* you will see more and more cause for sorrow. Of some we simply read that "*they would not come.*" They made no excuses or apologies, but curtly said

they would not come. There was an end of the matter. Many dismiss the gospel at once; they are not to be reasoned with: they do not want it, and will not have it. A large class of the community have heard of the way of salvation, but they care nothing for it. It is not with them want of information, but want of inclination. They have neither mind nor will for heavenly things.

A second class made light of it. They were indifferent to royal honours and duties. They were taken up with the care of what they had in possession, and went their way, each man to his farm, saying, "I have worked hard to get my farm, and I cannot afford to let it lie idle." Another was taken up with the care of getting an estate, and went to his merchandise, saying, "I have nobody to keep my shop. I must mind the main chance. If you do not look alive, everybody will run over you. I must attend to my buying and my selling." The worldly-wise make up a very numerous class. The rich man cannot be religious, his position in society prevents; the poor man cannot mind the things of God, he is worn out by earning his daily bread. Thus they all make excuse. Lord, when so many are unwilling, and so many more are occupied with other things, how shall the wedding be furnished with guests?

A third class were violently opposed: they would not be bothered, they had no patience with religious cant: they "took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." These are not so numerous as the others; but yet they are found among us. Sceptics, swearers, revilers of godliness, and "modern thought" men: these revile the cross, and are ferocious against the gospel. When we see these raging and raving, we are apt to ask very mournfully—How can the wedding be furnished with guests?

The most dreadful thought of all remains: *some of the invited had already perished.* The king in his wrath sent his troops and slew the murderers of his messengers, and burned their city. While I have been preaching, many of my hearers have died. Where are they now? If they died without Christ they are now past hope. Ah me! they can never enter now, for the door is shut. If they died in their sins, they are in the outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. When you think of it, this is a dark prospect. Men are dying, dying without hope; and those who are yet alive are resolved to perish in like manner, for they are earnestly invited to the feast of love, but they refuse to come. How can the wedding be furnished with guests?

The King tells us the real reason why they would not come: *they were not worthy.* Those who were invited specially, and about whom there was the greatest hope, had nothing in them to encourage that hope: they were not loyal, they were not kind-hearted, they were not honest, they were not worthy, else they would have come to do honour to the son of their King. Their not coming revealed the enmity of their hearts. It was a wretched way of showing their spite to the Prince upon his wedding-day. It is horrible that men refuse Christ and heaven out of enmity to God. Rejectors of Christ are unworthy of pardoning grace, unworthy of a dying Saviour, unworthy of those marriage bonds into which Jesus enters with believing hearts. They

are not worthy in the gospel sense of worthiness, and of course they were far less worthy in a legal sense.

The most mournful spectacle in the world is a heart which refuses the mercy of God. Objection is sometimes made to the doctrine of *total* depravity. I do not know what adjective can be too strong to describe human depravity when I perceive that it refuses God under his loveliest aspect: God in the greatness of his love, God sparing not his own Son. If men turn away from God in anger I can understand it; if men turn aside from God in justice I can understand it; but when they so hate God that they will not even have his salvation, when they refuse pardon through the precious blood of Christ, when they will sooner be damned than reconciled to God, this shows that their heart is desperately wicked. The cross rejected is the clearest proof of the heart depraved. There I leave this mournful subject, and go a step further. Certainly it did seem as if the wedding would not be furnished with guests.

II. Secondly, IT WAS A MOURNFUL PROSPECT. Imagine that there had been no guests at the wedding feast: what then?

First, *it would have been greatly to the king's dishonour.* The Crown Prince is married, and nobody comes to the wedding! The feast is free, costly, plentiful, but nobody will come to it. What an insult? The banqueting-hall is lighted, and the minstrels are in their place, but no eyes or ears are charmed. Oxen and fatlings make the tables groan, but none are there to make the hall resound with shout and song. What a wretched spectacle! Empty halls, unfurnished benches, meat untasted carried out to the dogs! History does not record a more deliberate and unmistakable insult. Let me translate the parable. If no souls are saved, if the great plan of redemption does not save, what a farce the whole business will be! What a dishonour to the name of the great God! Look at the supposition, that you may see the impossibility of it. Think for an instant of a defeated, disappointed, dishonoured Jehovah! Can it be? And yet, if the wedding had not been furnished with guests, the king would have been disappointed and insulted in the tenderest point. If the chosen are not saved, if men are not brought to Christ, then the glorious name of the God of grace is dishonoured. Do you think it can be so?

In the next place, suppose none had come to the wedding feast; then *the king's son would have been grieved.* His wedding, and nobody there! If it were your own, perhaps you could put up with it; for you do not stand in so public a position as the king's son, and you have not provided so vast a banquet. But the king's son! Only imagine that it is his wedding-day, and the servants are mustered in the hall, but not a single guest arrives. He has no one to congratulate him upon the happy day, no one to wish him well, no one to welcome the bride. Now, the same is true of our Lord Jesus Christ: if he dies, and men do not believe in him; if he rises again, and men do not accept him; if he enters heaven as a Prince and a Saviour, and yet no one receives repentance and remission, where is his honour? where is his glory? Look at the dreadful supposition, and think whether it can be. I am sure, as you gaze upon it, you will say, "Impossible! A bleeding Saviour cannot die in vain. Our Christ

could not in death have paid down the ransom price for nothing. He could not have stood a substitute for men, and yet see men lost after all!"

If no guests had arrived, *how disappointed would the Bride have been!* She, too, would have had to share in the failure of the day. Her bridal would not have been remembered with pleasure. She would have been happy in the bridegroom, but also unhappy because of the unkindness shown to him. In vain her rich apparel, and her costly ornaments, for there are no eyes to gaze upon them. If souls are not saved the church misses her greatest joy. When men believe in Jesus, how delighted we are! Our hearts leap for joy when men repent. But if sinners are not saved, if the preaching of the gospel is in vain, if they will not come to Christ, then are saints full of heaviness, and the church cries out in her anguish, "Hast thou forgotten to be gracious?"

Had none come to the marriage feast, *a store of provisions would have been wasted.* The King says, "My oxen and my fatlings are killed." See the bullocks roasting whole! See yonder fatted calf killed for the feast! Mark how the sheep are led to the slaughter! All this will remain untasted. Yonder dainty dishes, and flowing bowls, and luscious fruits will have none to enjoy them. It will be a wretched business indeed! I want you to look at the dreadful picture till it vanishes out of sight. Can it be that Jesus has made himself the heavenly bread, and none will feed on him, or at the best a very few? Can it be that he has provided a robe of righteousness, and nobody will wear it? Is heaven prepared, and will it remain half occupied? I do but suppose it for the moment, to make you see what a melancholy fact a failure in the scheme of mercy would be.

Would it not have meant, also, *the enemy's triumph?* The king's foes would have heard of it, and laughed him to scorn. At a royal wedding he could not command guests! How they would scoff at his wasted provision! "Ha, ha! Ha, ha!" The story would have been told on every ale-bench. The sons of Belial would make rare mirth of it. The King, the Prince, the Bride would all have been ridiculed, because of a wedding in empty halls, a feast with phantom guests! I do not believe that God intends to let Satan triumph in this way. I cannot imagine that he will allow the powers of darkness thus to open their wicked mouths against him. If free-will refuses the gift of God, free-grace will come in and win the day. I have shown you already how free-will threatens to empty the banqueting-hall, and dishonour the King, the Son, and the Bride; and if the business had been left to the free-will of man, this is the result which would have come of it: a God dishonoured, and men preferring to die rather than accept life through Jesus Christ. Then it could never have been said that "the wedding was furnished with guests."

III. Let us go a step further and notice that in the parable THIS CATASTROPHE WAS GRACIOUSLY PREVENTED. "The wedding was furnished with guests."

We are very much in the same case to-day as the servants were in when the invited ones would not come. We preach and teach the gospel, but we have to complain that so many will not come to the

banquet of grace. God gives us many souls, but not so many as we desire. We are eager for many more, and we begin to be afraid lest, after all, God should not be glorified as we wish that he should be. In the parable an unfurnished banquet was prevented, and so it will be in the reality. How was the calamity averted?

It was prevented, first, by *a fuller invitation.* At first the heralds only called those who had been previously bidden, a sort of aristocracy of hopeful persons. As these would not come, we read, "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage." They went out, not to a select band, but to all whom they might find. Brethren, it is a grand thing when we get a clearer idea of what the gospel really is. The more evangelical our notions become, so that we are prepared to preach the gospel to every creature under heaven and to say, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," the more we may hope for large success. If, by my preaching, I lead a man to look at himself, to see whether there is anything in him which entitles him to believe, I practically hide the gospel from him. If I preach up character unduly, so that the man mainly enquires whether he has that character, I fix his eye upon himself; and this is not what I should aim at. If I go forth and gather together as many as I find, both good and bad, then their thoughts are on the banquet rather than on themselves. We want men to look to Jesus, and therefore we cry, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." When we get upon clear gospel lines, and keep there, we may expect to see the arm of the Lord revealed, and the wedding furnished with guests.

Again, *the invitation was now given more publicly.* They had simply gone to the houses of the invited guests, and said, "All things are ready: come." But now the servants go to the chief places of concourse; and they cry aloud, and spare not among the crowds of men. One has gone to the market-cross; another is preaching where four ways meet. Hark to the voice of one upon the village green, and to the songs of others as they traverse the back slum! You cannot now go along a street without hearing the news of the great wedding feast. Many will be brought in when many are eager to bring them in. God is pleased to own the means which he has himself ordained. The more constant and public the proclamation of the gospel becomes, the more numerously will men be saved through the Spirit of God. Then is the set time to favour Zion come. We are not to hide our lamp under a bushel. He that knows the gospel should speak it out as plainly as he can, and let his voice be as the silver trumpets of jubilee, that every ear may hear. It came to pass that the king's message was more widely made known, and thus "the wedding was furnished with guests."

Another matter assisted: *the servants were now thoroughly aroused.* I am sure I should have felt dreadfully agitated to see all those provisions and none coming to eat them. Think of the halls decorated, the cooks working day and night, the big fires burning, bullocks roasting, the wines on the lees set abroach, and yet no guests. It would have worried me greatly, and you too. You would have said, "It cannot be, it must not be, we cannot bear it. The king, how

sadly he must feel! The good prince, how bitter it is for him! The dear bride, what must be her sadness when this great insult is put upon her! Here, I must fetch in some guests, or die in the attempt." I am sure we should have travelled six ways at once if we could; we should have invited with a thousand mouths if possible. Getting hold of one man's coat and of another man's sleeve, we should have compelled them to come in. This, also, is the Lord's way of blessing men. He arouses his own people, makes them sorrowful for the sins of the times, and then they grow earnest and troubled, and so they lay themselves out to snatch men as brands from the burning. "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." The want of travailing causes the absence of conversion. When we begin to sigh, and cry, and mourn, because the ways of God are forsaken, then our earnestness moves the heart, both of God and man, and the guests come to the wedding.

Again, the calamity of a wedding without guests was prevented by *a certain secret power which went with the messengers.* We read that they "gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good." They did not merely invite them, but they gathered them in. Now people are not to be gathered in in great numbers all of a sudden, and led to a feast by mere words. Words are but air. There is nothing in our words to make men come to Jesus unless the Lord works by them. Yet the guests did come in shoals. An influence went with the words of those servants which drew the people together; they could not wish to stay away; they came gladly. Their wills were sweetly inclined, and they thronged the palace. Beloved, all the hope of our ministry lies in the Spirit of God operating upon the spirits of men. I want all the members of this church to feel this more deeply and practically than ever. Do not put trust in the preacher: if he happens to be away, do not think that God is tied to him. Look for a blessing upon the gospel itself whoever preaches it. If the Holy Ghost be with us we shall see thousands flocking to Jesus. No sinner will ever come to Christ apart from the quickening, enlightening, drawing, converting power of the Holy Ghost, supernaturally exercised upon the conscience and heart. Let us believe this; and next, let us be assured that the Spirit of God is with us, and let us then go forth with all boldness. To the street-corner, the cottage, the lodging-house, the wayside, let us go forth and publish abroad the invitation of the great King: "My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."

Thus you have seen the outward means by which the Holy Spirit brings men to Jesus, and the wedding is furnished with guests.

IV. I close by noticing, in the fourth place, that IN THE END THE FEAST WAS A GLORIOUS SUCCESS. "The wedding was furnished with guests." Guests are a part of the furniture of a wedding feast. You may pile on your gold and silver plate, hang up your banners, load your tables, and sound your music; but if you have no guests the feast is a failure. It is our solemn conviction that the Lord our God has never failed yet, and that he never will fail. We believe that the Lord's eternal purpose will stand, and that he will do all his pleasure. We believe in no blind fate, but we trust in a predestination which is

full of eyes, which accomplishes its purpose to the least jot and tittle. God's greatest work is redemption; will he fail in it? Salvation is the focus of his glory; shall this be frustrated? If God were to fail in connection with the cross, it would be a failure indeed; God would be dishonoured, and his crown jewels cast into the mire. But it shall not be.

Turn to the parable, and we find *there were sufficient guests*: "the wedding was furnished with guests." There were as many guests as were necessary to the honour of the King, and his Son, and his Bride. Oh yes, in the gathering up and consummation of all things, the wedding of the Lord Jesus will be amply furnished with guests: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." There will be no disappointment to Christ at the last great day. Satan may whisper disaster and disappointment to us at this hour, and for the moment it may seem as if the forces of darkness triumphed; but the end is not yet. The will of God, so full of grace and mercy, shall be accomplished, the preparations of grace shall be used, and the purpose of love fulfilled. As the wedding was furnished with guests so shall heaven be filled with "a number which no man can number."

The feast was more of a success than it would have been had there been no opposition. *The persons who came to the wedding were more grateful* than the first invited might have been if they had come. The richer sort had a good dinner every day. Those farmers could always kill a fat sheep; and those merchants could always buy a calf. "Thank you for nothing," they would have said to the king if they had accepted his invitation. But these poor beggars picked off the streets, they had not tasted meat for months. Their half-starved bodies welcomed the fatlings. How glad they were! One of them said to the other, "It's a long time since you and I sat down to such a joint as this," and the other answered, "I can hardly believe that I am really in a palace dining with a king. Why, yesterday I begged all the day, and only had twopence at night. Long live the king, say I, and blessings on the prince and his bride!" I warrant, they were thankful for such a feast. They said it was an ill wind that blew nobody any good: because their betters had refused to come, there was now room for them. When the Lord saves great sinners, such as you and me, he wins warm hearts for himself. When the Lord saves unlikely ones, he gets unusual thankfulness. When he brings in the drunkard and the profane, the unclean and the hardened, and makes them pure, and holy, and puts them among the children, what gratitude he gets! The Pharisee may ask Christ to a cold dinner, but it is the woman that was a sinner who will wash his feet with tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head. If some of you moralists get saved—and God grant you may!—you will never prize the precious blood so much as those do who are washed by it from foulest stains.

The joy that day was much more expressed than it would have been had others come. Those ladies and gentlemen who were first invited, if they had come to the wedding, would have seated themselves there in a very stiff and proper manner. Dear me, what a fine thing propriety is! And yet, what a dead thing it is! One said to me the other day, "I have gone to my place of worship for many years, and

nobody ever did speak to me that I know of, and nobody ever will; for we are all too respectable to know one another." You know the dignified style of self-satisfied people. Among such there is no cordiality, no freshness, no sweet naturalness. Did you ever attend a breakfast or a dinner of beggars? Did you ever see a company of very hungry people feeding to their heart's content? They make a merry clatter; they are not muzzled by propriety; they are glad at the sight of every dish. They look at the waiters as angels; and when the hurrahing comes to be done, you admire the strength of their lungs. The dull monotony of respectability knows no joy like that which comes to poverty when it feasts to the full at the table of bounty. The Crown Prince was happier that day among his poor subjects than he would have been among the grandees and the fashionables. Those paupers, those labourers, those tramps, those hedge-birds, those were the fellows to make merry. To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much. Up in heaven they sing like the voice of many waters and like great thunder, because they have been cleansed from many sins and have partaken of great grace. Let the Pharisee and the moralist refuse the gospel; there are those about who, in accepting it, will do it greater honour than their dull souls could ever render to it. Thus the wedding was furnished with guests, who expressed their joy enthusiastically.

How the provisions were relished! It does one good to see a hungry man eat his food. To him even every bitter thing is sweet. He does not turn over his food and cut off every little bit of gristle, as some of you do because of your delicate appetites. The true gospel hearer hearkens to the text—"Eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." He does not act the critic, and cavil at this expression and that. He is too sharp-set to be particular about the dishes and the carving. We marvel sometimes at the capacity of hungry men; there is no end to it; and it is the same with spiritual as with natural hunger. I think I can tell what happened at that wedding: the Bride nudged the Bridegroom and said, "See these poor people eat! Is it not a pleasure to give one's oxen and fatlings where they are so much needed?" The Bridegroom was as happy as he could be, for he was of a sympathizing heart, and he greatly rejoiced in the joy of the poor people around him. The king himself that day was gladdened as he saw what a gallant company of trenchermen they were, and how there was no niggling, nor finding fault, but only unbroken enjoyment and gratitude. The choicest kind of guests had been collected if the object was to give joy. Ah dear friends! if you have a deep sense of sin, you will greatly love free grace and dying love. This is the lack of certain gentlemen who are always finding fault with the gospel: they never knew their own state by nature and by practice, and therefore they do not prize salvation. If they had felt a few lashes of the ten-thonged whip of the law upon their bare consciences, they would relish gospel forgiveness far more. He that has been in the prison of conviction prizes blood-bought freedom. He that has felt the chains of sin values the liberty where-with Christ makes him free. So I say, that inasmuch as these poor creatures were brought in from the streets, and their splendid appetites enjoyed the feast, the wedding festival was no failure, but all the

greater success, because of the king's enemies. The wedding was furnished with guests—guests who enjoyed the abundance provided by the King.

Certainly, *the occasion became more famous* than it would otherwise have been. If the feast had gone on as usual it would have been only one among many such things; but now this royal banquet was the only one of its kind, unique, unparalleled. To gather in poor men off the streets, labouring men and idle men, bad men and good men, to the wedding of the Crown Prince—this was a new thing under the sun. Everybody talked of it. There were songs made about it, and these were sung in the king's honour where none honoured kings before. In the kitchens, among the servants, this was a fine story to tell by the fireside, while Mary and Jane wished they had been there to see. In every lodging-house for years to come this would be the favourite story—the tale of the poor man's prince, and the needy man's queen. On the exchange and in the market men talked of the brave bride and bridegroom who had defied the customs of fashion, and had done a deed so daring in its goodness. Was ever such a thing heard of before? Here was a feast for men who never feasted before! Sensible men said, "And nothing could be better: they were feeding those that wanted feeding: they were giving good cheer to those who have little enough of it." Among the poor themselves the Prince's name was very famous, while the portrait of the Princess was nailed up over the mantel-piece. Children said to one another, "My father went to the wedding of the imperial prince." To many it seemed like a story out of the Arabian Nights. It did not read like a piece of common history at all, but like a fairy tale of the age of gold. Dear friends, when the Lord saved some of us by his grace, it was no common event. When he brought us great sinners to his feet, and washed us, and clothed us, and fed us, and made us his own, it was a wonder to be talked of for ever and ever. We will never leave off praising his name throughout eternity. That which looked as though it would defame the King turned out to his honour, and "the wedding was furnished with guests."

One thing more: *the king's liberality was all the better seen.* If those who were first bidden had put in an appearance, they would have come arrayed in their own scarlet and fine linen. Some of the gentlemen would have bought a new suit on purpose. You may depend upon it, all the cunning women in the city would have been employed to get their ladyships ready for the banquet, that they might have honour in the court that day. Now these fine clothes would have been more for the glory of those who came in them, than for the honour of the King. There was nothing of this among those who were gathered from the highways. They were in sorry gear. It was difficult, perhaps, in some cases, to tell which was the original stuff of their garments, so patched and mended were they. Anyhow, they were a ragged regiment; and what was the consequence? Why, then they must all be dressed in the Prince's own livery, and all the glory of their apparel must be unto him. He said to his servants, "Go to my wardrobe. Bring forth changes of raiment." Everyone that came in to the feast was invited to put on the king's wedding garments.

When he came in to see the guests, it was a grand sight, for everybody was royally arrayed. The king's wedding robes were much better than his subjects' best suits. It was a grand sight to see so many all in one royal livery; every guest wearing the uniform of mercy. So is it with us poor sinners, saved by grace. If we had possessed any true righteousness of our own we should have worn it; but now we count our own righteousness but dross and dung that we may win Christ and be found in him. His righteousness decorates all the saints: they could not be better arrayed. Thus is the feast made more glorious than it otherwise would have been, and the wedding is furnished with guests.

How I wish that I could gather in many this morning, both bad and good! I mean by good, those who are comparatively so as to their moral conduct. You are bidden to come to the wedding-feast of love. But even if you are bad, and obliged to own that you are so, I am equally anxious to gather you in to the feast. Do you ask me: What are we to do? What were these persons to do? To come just as they were, and freely receive what the king had freely provided. Sometimes at our treats for Sunday-school children every child is told to bring his own mug and plate; but it is not so with our great King. His banquet is too royal for that. You are to bring nothing. Still, everybody must go home and wash, must he not? No, the washing and the clothing shall all be done for you at the King's palace. Come as you are. "But what do you mean by coming?" We mean trusting: trust your soul with Jesus Christ, and he will save it. Trust him, and you shall know that he died in your room, place, and stead, so that, believing in him, you shall not perish, but have everlasting life. May the Holy Spirit lead you to believe in Jesus, that is, trust him.

I have told you the gospel, and the whole of it. Trust the crucified Saviour, and you shall live. Jesus says, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." Do not look within to see what is there, but look to Jesus hanging on the cross. A look at Christ crucified will save you. Look, dear girls, young as you are, look to Jesus now! Look, ye grey-headed men and women who have never looked before: look now! Strangers and foreigners, who have not heard this word before, there is life in a look at the Crucified One for you! Ye guiltiest of the guilty, and ye most amiable of the amiable, turn away from anything there is in yourselves, bad or good, and look to Jesus only. Receive from Jesus all he brings you—pardon, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, himself. He that comes to a wedding feast has nothing to do but to eat and to drink. Give your mind up to this delightful exercise. Take the food which God provides you. You shall do good works afterwards, for they will follow as a consequence of the strength which comes of receiving heavenly food through faith; but just now eat, drink, and be merry, as becomes a Prince's marriage. May the Father be pleased, his Son be honoured, and his church be comforted through you! Amen, and Amen.

What Is the Wedding Garment?

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"—Matthew xxii. 11—13.

Two Sabbath mornings ago I preached from this parable, and I trust many were encouraged by it; but I noticed among enquirers who came to see me afterwards, a desire to know about the wedding garment; for they feared lest, in coming to join the church, they should come like the man of whom I shall now speak. Many true hearts are extremely sensitive to the impression of fear, and they seem to be on the watch for reasons for anxiety. I do not condemn them; on the contrary, I wish there were more of such holy tremblers. It is much better to be afraid of being wrong than to be indifferent as to what you are. I perceive among the very best of the saints a considerable number who are deeply anxious as to their state before God. Those who will one day be cast out of the wedding feast are feeding themselves without fear, while those who have the most right to enjoy the banquet are full of gracious anxiety. Solomon says, "Happy is the man that feareth alway": he will cling closely to his God, and that will make him happy; he will not run risks like the presumptuous, and so he will be happy. Holy fear spreads few banquets, but it takes care that when there is a feast we go to it in a wedding garment.

My chief object this morning will be to allay the fears of gracious ones. If they understand what the wedding garment really is, they will probably discover that they are wearing it; and, if not, they will know in whose wardrobe that garment of joy is to be found, and they will gladly ask to be arrayed therein. May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, give a wedding joy this morning to each wedding guest, by causing him to see for certain that he is clothed in the wedding robe.

Immediately after our text, we find these solemn words: "Many are called, but few are chosen." This is a conclusion drawn from the

whole parable, in which we see processes at work, which separate the chosen few from the many who are called. A distinction was made by the summoning of the invited guests. The simple delivery of the invitation set a difference between the loyal and the rebellious—a distinction most marked and decisive. So it is in the preaching of the gospel: we preach it to every creature within our reach. Lovingly, tenderly, earnestly; not so well as we would, but still with all our heart we call men to the royal feast of grace; and straightway the very invitation begins to gather out the precious from the vile. Pure gospel preaching is very discriminating. You can tell Cain from Abel as soon as the sacrifice is the subject. Preach salvation by grace, and you find that some will not have it at any price, others postpone all consideration of it, and a third party raise questions without end. Still do men make light of it, and go their way to their farms and to their merchandise. Thus, dear friends, every Sabbath day, without our attempting to sit in judgment on men, the gospel is in itself a refining fire. In the gospel the Son of David has a throne of judgment as well as of mercy. When men will not have Christ and his grace, the Word preached by his humble servant drives them away, and they go with the chaff. But the work of discrimination is not finished after the gospel has been heard and men have been brought into the church. Alas! even in the church division has to be made; indeed, it is there that this is most fully carried out. "His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." If he uses a scourge nowhere else, he will be sure to use it in his own temple. Among the sheep there are goats; among the virgins there are foolish ones; and among the guests at the wedding feast there are those who have not on the wedding garment. Until we come to heaven itself we shall always discover necessity for the work of self-examination. Even in the apostolic college, Judas carried on his knavery, as if to warn us that no rank in service, no honour among brethren, no length of experience can screen us from the necessity of saying, "Lord, is it I?" when his warning voice saith, "One of you shall betray me." In our text we see a man who has hearkened to the invitation and has come into the feast, and thus has passed the first test; and yet he is unable to abide the second; he has been received by the servants, but he cannot deceive their Master. The King detects him as a spot in the feast, and he is cast out from the palace of mercy into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. May none of us be of this sort.

I shall endeavour to answer four questions naturally arising out of the parable. First, *What is meant by the king's coming in?*—"when the king came in to see the guests"; secondly, *What is the wedding garment?* thirdly, *Who is he that hath it not;* and fourthly, *Why did he stand speechless* when he was asked, "How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?"

I. May the Holy Spirit help us while we consider, first, WHAT IS MEANT BY THE KING'S COMING IN.

"The king came in to see the guests." They were all reclining at the tables, for "the wedding was furnished with guests." They gathered while the sun was up, but darkness covered the world outside

when "the king came in to see the guests." They had feasted, and now the king came to honour the assembly.

It was the crown and the culmination of the feast. No matter how dainty the viands, nor how bright the hall, the feast has not reached its height till his majesty appears in gracious condescension. It is so with us, beloved, in reference to our greater King. When we are gathered in this house, which has often proved to us a palace of delights, we never reach the height of our desire till the Lord manifests himself to us. You delight to hear the preacher, and to join in the song, and to say Amen to the prayer, but these are not all. Your heart and your flesh cry out for God, for the living God; you look to behold the King in his beauty. When the glorious Father reveals himself in Christ Jesus, then the Sabbath is a high day, for our prayer is answered, "Make thy face to shine upon thy servant." Our glorious King is not always equally manifest in our solemn assemblies. Doubtless because of our sins he hideth himself. In truth he is always with us; for the feast is his, and the hall is his, and every guest is brought in by his grace, and every dish on the table is placed there by his love; but yet there are times when he is specially seen among his people. Then our communion with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ, is sweet indeed.

These are seasons of gracious visitation: times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. When the King comes into the assembly, the preaching of the word is in demonstration of the Spirit, and in power. Then the day of Pentecost has fully come: the Spirit is abundantly outpoured, souls are saved, saints are edified, and Christ is glorified. The spiritual soon detect the divine presence, and the shout of a King is heard in the camp. When I think of it, my heart cries out with Isaiah, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence!" The presence of our God brings with it heavenly happiness, solemn content, and overflowing joy. Well does Dr. Watts sing:—

"The King himself comes near,
And feasts his saints to-day;
Here we may sit and see him here,
And love, and praise, and pray.

"One day amidst the place
Where my dear God hath been
Is sweeter than ten thousand days
Of pleasurable sin."

Beloved friends, you know better than I can tell you when the King is near, and you know sorrowfully when he is not in the assembly. Alas, from how many congregations is he absent, and that absence unmourned! When the Lord is gone we spread our sails, but there is no wind: we bring the sacrifice, but there is no fire. The wedding would have been a failure without guests; but what would the feast have been if the host had refused to come in and see the guests? But the King came in in due time. Ay, came in among that crowd of wayfarers gathered from the highways at a moment's notice, and his presence crowned the festival with honour and rapture.

This coming in to see the guests indicates *a glorious revelation of himself.* When the King saw the guests, the guests saw *him;* but, inasmuch as his sight of them was the more important sight of the two, the chief thing is mentioned while the minor matter is implied. Do we know what it is to see God? This is the special privilege of the pure in heart. When the Lord's way is in the sanctuary, then his sanctified ones behold him. Spiritual eyes have looked to Jesus by faith, and he saith, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Have you never been like John in Patmos, ready to swoon away because of the revelation of the Father in Christ? When Jesus has been set forth evidently crucified among us, we have in him beheld the face of the great King, and our hearts have leaped for joy, so that we have been ready to leap into heaven itself if the word had been given. When Augustine read those words, "Thou canst not see my face and live," he was bold enough to answer, "Let me die to see thy face."

Blessed vision!

"Lord, let me see thy beauteous face!
It yields a heaven below;
And angels round the throne will say,
'Tis all the heaven they know."

The King delights to see his guests, and his guests delight to see him. Then is our worship full of bliss, and no place out of heaven is so like to heaven as the place of our assemblies. We read in the Gospel of John: "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord"; and well they might be. Then are we glad also when we distinctly discern him as our Lord and our God. My own soul knows this joy unspeakable, but because it is unspeakable, I say no more.

For the King to come in and see the guests includes *a manifestation of special favour.* He comes in, not to judge the guests, but to look upon them. You that were here last Thursday might will remember my text: "Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name." The Lord is accustomed to look with favour upon those who love his name, for he is pleased with them. O brothers and sisters, when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost; when the Father lifts upon us the light of his countenance, then our summer weather is come. Can anything be compared with the favour of God? The smiles of kings, the friendships of emperors—do not mention them in the same day. Some of you know that the Lord loves you; yea, that he loved you from before the foundation of the world, and he will love you when the world has ceased to be. Oh that the King would come here this morning in that sense, and look into all your faces, and give you all the full assurance that you are in his heart, and shall be there to all eternity! Oh that this whole church may be a living temple in which the Lord shall delight to dwell; may every stone of it be brilliant with the reflected light of his favour; may all our testimonies and labours be acceptable unto him, and may he be very gracious at the voice of our cry! O Jehovah, manifest thyself here as thou didst between the cherubim! For thy sake we have borne reproach; Lord be our glory! We have held fast thy truth; we beseech thee, let the light of thy countenance encourage us!

But here is the solemn point to which I call your attention: this visitation brings with it *a time of discovery and searching of heart.* When the King comes in to see the guests, the light grows stronger, and hidden things are revealed; for all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. When the Lord visits his church, his fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem; then the man without a wedding garment is winked at no longer. You can go on sleeping as a church when God is away, and no members will fall off; for those who know not the Lord will come in and go out among you as aforetime. The dead will remain quiet till the Lord sounds the trumpet of resurrection: mere professors will not know that they are making a false profession, but will remain at ease in our solemn feasts. But when the King comes in all things are changed. "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope." You cannot receive abundant spiritual life into the church without the discernment of the unworthy, and the explusion of the spiritually dead. One goes away because he is offended at the doctrine, another is grieved at the heart-searching experience, and a third feels himself too sternly rebuked as to his life. Thus the Lord's visitation of grace becomes an assize of judgment, and the finger of the Lord writes upon the wall, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." If the Lord our God were to come into his church to-day there would be an awful shrinkage among the number of his guests; a panic would seize the assembly, and the door would be blocked with men hastening to escape his eye.

Look how the king's discernment is recorded in the text. One man only had refused to put on a wedding garment; but the king at once fixed his eye upon him. The Saviour, by a kind of heavenly charity, mentions only one intruder, but I fear we must regard the one as the type of many. If the King should come in at the time of our communion, I am afraid he would detect more than one. Still, if there were but one, he would concentrate his gaze upon that one, and speak to him by himself. If you are the only person who has dared to enter the church knowing that you are not converted, the King will spy you out. If you make a profession of religion out of bravado, and keep it up by sheer deceit, you may hide yourself away among your family connections, or think that your respectability will screen you; but you are mistaken. You have to deal with one whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and he will so unmask you that you will not have a word to say in your own defence. This is a solemn matter. It will not make the true-hearted wish the King to stay away, but those who are wilful deceivers may well tremble. The King does come to this church. He is specially present in the midst of this people, and the consequence is that his judgment is strict with us. I have seen the rod of his discipline here in a very striking manner. I have seen the fair professor wither in the heat of love, and the rootless Christian dried up in the noontide of grace. He might have gone on very well in any other church, but he has not been able to abide the brandished sword of the Spirit, and its dividing asunder soul and spirit, joints and marrow.

He has not been able to sit it out, but has been obliged to go away and find an easier rest. Just in proportion as we really have the King in the midst of us making glad the saints, we shall have the King in the midst of us discerning the false and casting them out, first into the outer darkness of the world, which lieth in the wicked one, and at last into the outer darkness of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Still, be the result what it may, our prayer this morning is, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us."

II. Now I would answer the second question: WHAT IS THE WEDDING GARMENT? You are probably aware that this has been a point greatly disputed among theologians. Is the wedding garment justification, or sanctification, or what? I am not going to be theological and bring doctrinal matters to the text; but I shall read the parable as it stands, and interpret its details by its general run. It is called a "*wedding* garment"—a garment suitable for a marriage feast. Let us translate the figure, rather than attempt to rivet a doctrine to it. What does a wedding garment mean? What is that which we must have in connection with our Lord's marriage or be cast out for ever?

I think I may say plainly that it must signify *a distinguishing mark of grace*. Everybody does not wear a wedding garment: he who wears it has put it on because he is a wedding guest. You know the wedding guest at once by his attire. He dresses in a way which would be considered singular if he were so arrayed every day. Your steady citizen indulges in a white waistcoat on the nuptial occasion, but he never dreams of going down to his office in the city in such gear. True members of the church of God wear a distinguishing mark. If you are not different from other people, you have no right in the church of God. If a servant can live with you for years and never discover your love to God, I should think there is none to discover. If you are just the same as those you lived with in your former days, if you have undergone no change, and are like the rest of men, you have not the distinguishing mark which sets forth your right to be in the church of God. There ought to be a something about us which sets us apart—a something which can be seen and understood by common people, even as a wedding garment could be seen, and its meaning at once perceived. Your religion must not require a microscope to perceive it, nor should it be so indistinct that few can discover any meaning in it. It should be as visible as the white garment which was worn by Easterns at a marriage. Is it so?

I may boldly add here that the wedding garment was a distinguishing mark of grace; for as these people were fetched in from the highways they could not have provided themselves with wedding garments. It is the custom in the East for a king to provide robes for his guests; therefore this wedding garment was a mark of grace, freely given and received. Is there, then, a something about you which the Lord in love has given you? Do you differ from others, not in natural attainments, but in spiritual grace? Does the difference mainly lie in what God himself has done for you? That is the question involved in the symbol of the wedding garment. Do you differ from what you

used to be. Do you differ from what you were years ago? Do you differ from those with whom you used to associate, so that you seek other company and turn aside from those who once were charming fellows to you? If so, you have on the wedding garment. It is a distinguishing mark. I do not mean to put this in a way that would grieve anybody here unless they ought to be grieved; but if they ought to be grieved, then we would have them cry to God for renewal by his grace. May the Lord make you to wear his livery! May he give you the spot of his children, and cause you no longer to be of the world! A distinguishing mark is plainly the first meaning of the wedding garment.

In the next place, it was *a symbol of respect for the king.* To be fit for his company, the dress must be special. The absence of such a dress was, in the case before us, the badge of irreverence and disloyalty. This man said to himself: "I will feed at the feast without acknowledging its intent. Whoever stops me, I will push my way in, and I shall sit there in my everyday garments, to let the king know that I do not respect him in the least, and will not wear the robes he provides." It is as if you had lost a son, and some wretched man should say, "I will attend the funeral in a wedding suit. I shall thus wound the feelings of the mourners, and show my contempt for the whole affair." What an insult it would be! To turn the picture. Suppose you were being married, and somebody forced his way into the wedding dressed in mourning, with crape upon his hat, and black kid gloves upon his hands. What a wanton insult! If such impudence were met with a horse-whip, who would be surprised? Now, this man acted in that fashion: he had no respect for the king: he showed his traitorous nature in the worst possible manner, spiting the king in his own halls upon a tender occasion. Dear friends, I trust that you can truly say, "I have on the wedding garment of reverence for the King. I do not despise the Lord God; but I bow before him in true worship. I would come into his church, not to dishonour him, but to give glory to his name." The wedding garment was a token of respect to him who had provided the feast and presided over it: judge you this day whether you have on the wedding garment, by enquiring whether you honour and reverence the Lord God, and labour to be obedient to him in all things.

The wedding garment was, moreover, *a token of honour for the Prince.* Those who put on the wedding garment did as good as say, "We join in the joy of the Prince, and come hither to-day to show our attachment to him, and to wish him joy of his bride." My hearers, do you feel a love to the Lord Jesus Christ? Many do not. I grieve to say we have a race of men sprung up nowadays who call themselves Christians, who pour contempt upon his precious blood, and ridicule the substitutionary sacrifice. Dreadful assertion! but it is a matter of fact. The name of Jesus, why, it is to our lives what the sun is to the skies, what the rivers are to the plains. Nothing makes us so glad as thoughts of Jesus. I am sure when I hear a sermon about Christ, my Master, my very heart grows warm within me. Is it so with you? Well, then, you have on the wedding garment; that is to say, you do truly, though it be but in a simple way, pay homage to the

Prince of Peace; you love the name and person of Jesus, and you come into his church because you do so.

The wedding garment also signified *a confession of sympathy with the great occasion.* Every man who ate of the fatlings, every man who drank of the wines, every man who gave his presence, was a helper in the honours of that wedding feast, save only this one intruder, who would not even pretend to join in the joy, for he refused the simple act of putting on a robe fit for the feast. Dear friend, do you feel sympathy with the Lord's purposes of grace? Do you rejoice that Jesus finds a bride among our race? Do you bless God for the covenant of grace, which includes incarnation, redemption, and sanctification? Do you bless the name of the incarnate God for taking into everlasting union with himself a people prepared of the Lord? Well, then, you are in sympathy with the marriage of the Lamb, and you have a right to be present at the feast. You evidently wear the wedding garment which denotes your joy in Christ, your interest in his Church, your part and lot in the joyous work of his salvation.

The wedding garment means, in a word, *conformity to the requirements of the occasion.* It was a wedding, and the guests must put on a suitable dress. This man refused to put it on. He was proud, and would not wear the gift of grace; he was self-willed, and must needs be singular, and show his independence of mind. The regulation was by no means irksome, and to the rest of the guests the commandment was not grievous; but this man would have his own way in defiance of the Lord of the feast. What could come of such folly? Now, beloved, one of the requirements of the feast is, that you with your heart believe on the Lord Jesus, and that you take his righteousness to be your righteousness. Do you refuse this? If you will not accept the Lord Jesus as your substitute, bearing your sins in his own body on the tree, you have not the wedding garment. Another requirement is that you should repent of sin and forsake it; and that you should follow after holiness, and endeavour to copy the example of the Lord Jesus. You are to possess, as the work of divine grace, a godly and upright character. Have you such a character? Even though you are not perfect, yet, inasmuch as you follow after righteousness, you have the wedding garment. You say that you are a Christian; do you live like a Christian? Are you in a position and condition which agree with the gospel feast? If so, you have on the wedding garment.

Those who came unto the feast were, when they came, both bad and good; so that the wedding garment does not relate to their past character, but relates to something with which they were invested when they came to the banquet. The putting on of a wedding robe cannot refer to an elaborate ceremony, or a feat of the intellect, or to a deep experience of the heart; and yet it involved joining in the wedding, or not joining in it. It involved reverence for the King, and homage to the Prince, and sympathy with the whole matter. Look well to yourselves, and see whether you truly yield yourselves to the Lord, and agree with him in the whole matter.

III. Thirdly, WHO IS THE MAN THAT HAS NOT ON THE WEDDING GARMENT?

I should say, first, *he is the man who rejects God's revealed gospel that he may follow his own thought and his own wisdom.* He says that he is loyal to Christ, and he expects all his fellow guests to be firm friends with him, for is he not in the banquet as much as they are? But he does not mean by loyalty what they mean by it. He is among believers, but he is not truly of them. He talks about atonement; he does not mean substitution. He talks about the divinity of Christ; he does not mean the Godhead of Christ. He talks about justification by faith; but he does not mean the old-fashioned doctrine. He speaks of regeneration, but means evolution. He girds himself with the garment of philosophy, but he refuses the robe of revelation, for the cut of it is too old-fashioned for him. He is no more a wedding guest than he is a merry-andrew; perhaps, not so much so. He wears raiment in which the robe of righteousness and the garments of gladness are not to be seen. The looms of free grace and dying love have never woven him a wedding dress. His robe is not of God's provision; it is from his own wardrobe. He glories in his own culture, and not in the revelation of God, nor yet in the work of divine grace upon the heart. He is in the church, but he is not in Christ. He has a name to live, but he is dead.

The next person who has not on the wedding garment is *the man who refuses the righteousness of God* because he has a righteousness of his own. He thinks his work-day dress good enough for Christ's own wedding. What does he want with imputed righteousness? He scouts it as immoral. He who is himself immoral! What does he want with the precious blood of Jesus? He does not need to be washed from crimson stains. He writes a paper against the sensuousness of those persons who sing—

> "There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins."

His own righteousness, though it be of the law, and such as Paul rejected, he esteems so highly that he counts the blood of the covenant an unholy thing! Ah me, the insolence of self-righteousness! Its pride is the very chief of sins, for it slights the righteousness of God. Practically, the self-righteous man does not see any wedding in the gospel system; he does not see anything in the gospel to make him glad, nothing for him to sing about, nothing to make him shout for joy of heart. He will not praise the Prince. Not he! He is under the law, and he is content to be a slave; he is trying to save himself by his own works, and law knows no holidays. He is not a wedding guest, but a mere drudge.

Another sort of person *has profession without feeling.* If he were outside of the church his conscience might trouble him: he has come inside of it, and now he says to himself, "It is all right." He does not care to watch his feelings; he never had any: he would rather not have any. To the power of the Word he is a stranger, though he knows the letter of it. As to repentance, and the burden of sin, he never knew them, and does not want to know them. He thinks Mr. Bunyan must have been superstitious or morbid when he wrote "Grace Abounding." Joy in the Lord is equally a thing unknown

to him, for he hates all excitement. He has no solemn depressions and no raptures, for he has no spiritual life. As he has no holy feeling, so he has no holy action: he is a Christian, he says; but having put up the sign-board, he drives no trade. His religion operates far more upon his boots and his hat than it does upon his heart: that is to say he comes out respectably dressed on a Sunday, but his religion never affects his conduct. Nobody can find much fault with him except that he is as dead as a door nail. He commits no gross sin, he certainly performs no brilliant deeds of piety. Spiritually he is a very well washed corpse—that is all.

We have others who are in the church, who *think that what they have done themselves, or what nature has done for them, is quite enough.* They do not seek anything supernatural. They do not want any wedding garment more than their every-day coats. They are quite reputable in appearance even now, and with a little touching up they will be good enough without the new birth, and without the Holy Spirit. Alas, my hearers! all that nature can ever do for you will leave you on the wrong side of heaven. You may cultivate nature to its utmost, it will never bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. "Ye must be born again." If you have not come into living contact with a living Saviour by the work of the Holy Ghost you may be in the Church, but you are not in Christ, and have not on the wedding garment.

Why, some dare to come into the church who *have not even common morality.* It is shocking we should have to say it, but nowadays, we meet with those who call themselves Christians who can drink upon the sly, who can commit uncleanness with their bodies, who can be dishonest in their trading, who can be liars, who can hate their own flesh and blood and be at enmity with their brethren, and yet dare to come to the communion table. In the highlands of Scotland it was at one time difficult to get Christian people to come to the Lord's Table, for they so trembled under a sense of their unworthiness. We do not want to push this too far, but that is a great deal better than that unholy daring, which is to be found in the minds of so many who serve Christ and Belial. God save his church from degradation! Unholy professors have not on a wedding garment: their outward robes by no means befit the King's feast; but they are a dishonour to him.

I do not see how that man can be said to have on a wedding garment *who takes no interest in the work of the church.* You see when a man put on the wedding garment, he did as good as say, "I am interested in the wedding. I wish God's blessing to the bride and bridegroom." But many come in now to the King's feast who do not care a snap of the finger for the church of God, nor for Christ either. They come in because a sort of selfishness makes them anxious to be saved; but as to the bride, the Lamb's wife, they do not care whether she starves or flourishes. Sad and wretched business this! If members of the church only can distribute tracts or attend meetings for prayer—if they are doing this, and show an interest thus in the wedding —they have on the wedding garment. But if all they do is simply to hear, either to criticize or to enjoy, but never work for Christ, nor pray for Christ, they have no sympathy in the wedding feast, and therefore they have not on a wedding garment.

IV. To close, WHY WAS THIS MAN SPEECHLESS? We do not often meet with people who have no excuse. Excuse-making is the easiest trade out. A man can make an excuse out of nothing at all, or out of what is less than nothing, out of a direct lie. But here was a man who could not speak? Why was that?

Well, I think, first, *the affront was too bare-faced.* "How camest thou in hither?" If he did not like the king he could have kept outside. There was no need why he should come in at all, and there display his malice. If any of you are resolved to be lost, you need not add to your eternal ruin by making a profession of religion, for hypocrisy is a superfluity of naughtiness. But this man wilfully refused the wedding garment. Now those dear souls I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon do not wilfully refuse the Lord's grace: I am sure they do not. Oh no, they are afraid they are not right, but they do not wish to be wrong. Such are not among those whom this parable condemns.

Next, *the affront was so audacious.* "How camest thou in hither?" said the King. He must have pushed by the deacons at the door. The fellow would come in. When the king said, "Bind him hand and foot," I think it was because he had used hand and foot to get in. He would get in; he said, "I will get in. I will defy the king to his face, and sit in among his guests without a wedding garment." You, dear friend, do not wish to do that: I am sure it is the last thing you would do. Why, we have to persuade you to come in at all; for you are so tenderly jealous lest you should be mistaken Do not let this parable condemn you.

But why was the man speechless? I answer once more, *because it was the king himself who spoke to him.* Ah! if I speak to you, what am I but flesh and blood? You do not mind me! But if the King himself were here to-day, and he said to any one of you, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" the tone of his voice, the glory of his presence, would flash in upon your hearts, you would be obliged to feel it, and you could not invent an answer. If you do not love him, if you have no reverence for him, no sympathy with his Son, you will be speechless before his bar.

Lastly, the reason why he was speechless was because, even if he could have spoken and been free from terror, *there was nothing to be said.* He could not cry, "Lord, I did not know it." He saw all the rest with wedding garments on. He could not say, "Lord, I could not get a wedding garment": each one had received a garment gratis, and he might have received the same. He could not say, "Lord, I was pushed in here by somebody else." No, he had willingly chosen to come, and to defy the rule. The guests had all looked at him: some had edged a little way off from him. Some had tenderly said, "Brother, will you not put on the wedding garment?" He answered, "No." "Will you not go out before the king comes in?" "Why," he said, "I came on purpose to defy him. I mean to keep my place." I do not wonder that the king said, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Our Lord Jesus Christ says very strong things about the future of the wicked. I have been accused of representing

the state of the lost in too horrible a manner. I have never gone beyond the dreadful descriptions given by our Lord himself. Do not risk your eternal future. Come to the church of God and join it, but do not join it unless you love the Lord. Do not come to the gospel feast unless you reverence the King; unless you love the Prince; unless you are in sympathy with the great work of grace which is pictured as a wedding feast. If you have sympathy with the wedding, love to the Bridegroom, and delight in the bride, then come and welcome; for you have the wedding garment. I am thinking just now of all those other hundreds of people at the wedding, all of them clothed with the wedding garment. What joy they felt! Many had been bad, and all had been poor: but they all had the wedding garment, and not one of them was cast out. If you will but put your trust in Jesus, and so honour the Son; and rest in the love of the Father, and so honour the King, it is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." God bless you for Jesus' sake! Amen.

The Wedding Garment

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen"—Matthew xxii. 11—14.

APPARENTLY the parable of the marriage feast would have been complete without this addition, but there was infinite wisdom in appending this sequel. This is seen practically in the experience of the church of God. Those who are permitted to see large additions to the church will find this parable of the wedding garment to be singularly appropriate and timely. Whenever there is a revival, and many are brought to Christ, it seems inevitable that at the same time a proportion of unworthy persons should enter the church. However diligent may be the oversight, there will be pretenders creeping in unawares who have no true part or lot in the matter, and hence, when the preacher is most earnest for the ingathering of souls to Christ, he needs to couple therewith a holy jealousy, lest those who come forward to make a profession of faith should be moved by carnal motives, and should not really have given their hearts to God. We must use the net to draw in the many, but all are not good fishes that are taken therein. On the threshing floor of Zion the heap is not all pure wheat, the chaff is mingled with the grain, and therefore the winnowing fan is wanted. God's furnace is in Zion, and there is good need for it, for the gold is yet in the ore, and needs to be separated from the dross. Wood, hay, and stubble building is quick work, but it is a waste of effort; we need continually to examine our materials, and see that we use only gold, silver, and precious stones. It is most needful in times of religious excitement, to remind men that godliness does not consist in profession, but must be proved by inward vitality and outward holiness. Everything will have to be tested by a heart-searching God, and if, when he comes to search us, we are found wanting, we shall be expelled even from the marriage feast itself; for there is a way to hell from the very gates of heaven. In a word, it is well for all men to be reminded that the enemies of the great King are not only outside the church, but they are even in it; while a part refuse to come to the wedding of his Son, others press into the banquet and are still his foes. May God grant that this subject may have a heart-searching effect. May it be as the

north wind when it blows through the marrow of the bones. May it lead us to desire to be searched and tried of God, whether we be truly in the faith, or are reprobates in his esteem.

The parable may be discoursed upon under five heads. Here is *an enemy at the feast;* here is *the king at the feast;* that king becomes *the judge at the feast;* and hence the enemy becomes *the criminal at the feast;* and swiftly is removed by *the executioner at the feast.*

I. We see in the text AN ENEMY AT THE FEAST.

He came into the banquet when he was bidden, but he came only in appearance, he came not in heart. The banquet was intended for the honour of the son, but this man meant not so; he was willing to eat the good things, but he intended no respect to the prince. He did not, like others, say "I will not come, for I will not have this man to reign over me;" but he said, "I will come, but it shall be in such a way that the royal purpose shall not be served, but rather hindered. I shall be present as an onlooker, but take no share in the ceremony; I will, on the contrary, show that I have no care for the business in hand, except so far as it serves my turn." The man came in the full exercise of self-will and self-love. He resolved to yield no homage, but to assert his independent self-sovereignty. He would show the king even at his table, where his bounties were so largely dispensed, that he was not afraid to affront him. When he came to the door of the feast, he found the guests all putting on the garment suitable for the marriage banquet. As here, in our own country, at a funeral, each mourner is expected to put on the articles of mourning which are provided, so at the wedding feast each person was expected to wear the bridegroom's favours, the garment which, as a badge, marked him as an attendant at the wedding, and as one who rejoiced in it. While others cheerfully put on this wedding dress the traitor would not; he resolved to defy the rules of the palace, and to insult the king by appearing in his own garments. He scorned to wear the livery of respectful joy, he preferred to make himself conspicuous by his daring insolence. The badge was intended to show that the wearer was a real participator in the joy of the feast, and for that very reason he would not put it on. He did not acknowledge the king nor the prince, nor care one atom about the gladsome event. He had no objection to be there, to eat the dainties, or recline upon the seats, and see the pomp and the show, but he was only in it, and not of it; he was there in body, but not in spirit. Are there not crowds of people whose union to the church is nothing better than an insult to God? Custom sways them, and not sincere faith. They have no regard to the great Head of the church or to the heart-searching God. They treat church-membership as a trifle, and have no tenderness of heart touching the matter. They, in effect, say, "The table of the Lord is contemptible." "Spots are they in our feasts, feeding themselves without fear."

Many a time the question has been asked, "What was the wedding garment?" It is a question which need not be curiously pryed into. So many answers have been given that I conclude that if our Saviour had intended any one specific thing he would have expressed himself more plainly, so that we should have been able, without so much theological disputing, to have understood what he meant. It seems to me that our Lord intended much more than any one thing. The guests were

bidden to come to the wedding to show their respect to the king and prince; some would not come at all, and so showed their sedition; this man came, and when he heard the regulation, that a certain garment should be put on, comely in appearance and suitable for the occasion, he determined that he would not wear it. In this act of rebellion, he went as far in opposition as they did who would not come at all; and he went a little further, for in the very presence of the guests and of the king, he dared to declare his disloyalty and contempt. Alas, how many are willing enough to receive gospel blessings, but they are still at enmity with God, and have no delight in the only Begotten Son. Such will dare to use the forms of godliness, and yet their hearts are full of rebellion against the Lord. The wedding garment represents anything which is indispensable to a Christian, but which the unrenewed heart is not willing to accept, anything which the Lord ordains to be a necessary attendant of salvation against which selfishness rebels. Hence it may be said to be Christ's righteousness imputed to us, for alas, many nominal Christians kick against the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of the Saviour, and set up their own self-righteousness in opposition to it. To be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith, is a very prominent badge of a real servant of God, and to refuse it is to manifest opposition to the glory of God, and to the name, person, and work of his exalted Son. But we might with equal truth say that the wedding dress is a holy character, the imparted righteousness which the Holy Spirit works in us, and which is equally necessary as a proof of grace. If you question such a statement, I would remind you of the dress which adorns the saints in heaven. What is said of it? "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Their robes therefore were such as once needed washing; and this could not be said in any sense of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; that was always perfect and spotless. It is clear then that the figure is sometimes applied to saints in reference to their personal character. Holiness is always present in those who are loyal guests of the great King, for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Too many professors pacify themselves with the idea that they possess imputed righteousness, while they are indifferent to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. They refuse to put on the garment of obedience, they reject the white linen which is the righteousness of saints. They thus reveal their self-will, their enmity to God, and their non-submission to his Son. Such men may talk what they will about justification by faith, and salvation by grace, but they are rebels at heart, they have not on the wedding dress any more than the self-righteous, whom they so eagerly condemn. The fact is, if we wish for the blessings of grace, we must in our hearts submit to the rules of grace without picking and choosing. It is idle to dispute whether the wedding garment is faith or love, as some have done; for all the graces of the Spirit and blessings of the covenant go together. No man ever had the imputed righteousness of Christ without receiving at the same time a measure of the righteousness wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. Justification by faith is not contrary to the production of good works: God forbid. The faith by which we are justified is the faith which produces holiness, and no man is justified by faith which does not also sanctify him, and deliver him from the love

of sin. All the essentials of the Christian character may be understood as making up the great wedding garment. In one word, we put on Christ, and he is "made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

The wedding garment is simply mentioned here as being a test of loyalty to those who came to the marriage feast, and as a mode by which rebellion was avowed and loyalty made apparent. Here was a man then who came in to the gospel feast, and yet refused to comply with the command which related to that feast. He wilfully preferred self to God, his heart was full of enmity and pride, he despised the gifts of grace, he scorned the rule of love, he stood a defiant rebel even at the banquet of mercy which his King had spread.

His sin lay, first of all, in coming in there at all without the wedding garment. If he did not mean to be of one heart with his fellow guests and his lord, why did he come? If a man does not intend to yield himself up to God's will, why does he profess to be of God's church? If a man is not saved by the righteousness of Christ, why does he profess to be a believer in Christ? If he will not be obedient to Christ's holy will, why does he pretend to be a follower of Christ? It is a grave mistake for any person to imagine that he can be in the church of God to his own advantage unless his heart is renewed, unless he means what he declares, and sincerely loves the rule under which he professes to put himself.

The intruder's sin was aggravated by the fact, that after he had unlawfully come into the feast he still continued there without the wedding robe. He does not appear to have had any compunction, or to have thought of amending his error. Only when the king came in and said, "Take him away," had the insolent rebel any idea of removing. Had he come in there, as I fear some of you have come into the church, under a mistake, thinking that there was no need of the wedding dress, when he looked around and saw all other persons wearing it, and observed that it was the peculiar mark of a guest, he would have felt uneasy and have gone to those who kept the royal wardrobe to get such a robe for himself; and then his sin in the matter would not have been laid to his charge. But he persisted in remaining where he was, and as he was. O my dear hearers, if you have already perpetrated the sin of union with the visible church of God without having the prerequisites, without being indeed submissive to God in heart and desirous to honour Christ, I entreat you, seek what is wanted, seek faith in God, seek a new heart, seek holiness of life, seek to become a loyal subject of the king, and be not content until you have these things, for the King will soon come in: he gives you time as yet, may he also give you grace to see to it that, being now where you ought never to have been, you may yet make your position a right one by obtaining that which will justify you in remaining where you are. The guest in his own clothes was a speckled bird amongst that company, it was possible for him even then to have become one of them; but he would not, he continued to defy the King.

This persistence he retained though he probably knew the fate of those who had refused to come. He knew that the king had sent forth his armies and destroyed those wicked men who had molested his messengers, and yet he dared to recline at his ease in the very teeth, and defying the terrible power of the monarch. He made

his brow as brass and hardened his heart as adamant, and forced his way into a position where his seditious spirit would be able to display itself conspicuously. He said within his soul, "I care nothing for this marriage. I will make sport of it; I will intrude myself into that feast and show my contempt. I will take the provisions, but the son shall have no honour from me, and the king shall not find me bend my will to his command." Thus he had the audacity to disport himself as a wilful rebel at the feast of mercy. Are there any such among you here? The tendency will be for those who are not so to begin to condemn themselves. I know already one who has said, "I am that guest that had not on a wedding garment." She is not that one, for she is not even a member of the church, and therefore it cannot concern her; but many like her write bitter things against themselves. Another will be saying, "I am that one," whereas, if there be one that lives near to God and whose desire is to be like Christ, and to be in all things conformed to the divine will, he is the man. You who are most assuredly right will probably be suspicious that you are not, and you who are insincere and have never submitted yourselves to the will of God will probably say, "What does it matter? I am doing as well as others, I give as much, I attend the means as much, surely there can be no cause for concern in me." God grant that you may feel anxiety and fear before the Lord.

II. We pass on to the next point—THE KING AT THE FEAST.

"The king came in to see the guests." What an honour and privilege this was to the poor creatures whom his royal munificence had brought together! Was it not indeed the chief point of the entire festival? One of our greatest joys is to sing—

> "The king himself comes near
> And feasts his saints to-day!"

What would church fellowship be if it had not the fellowship of God with it? To sit with my dear brethren and rejoice in their love is exceedingly delightful; but the best wine is fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. The king did not provide the banquet and leave his guests to eat by themselves, but he "came in;" and into every gospel church gathered according to his command the King will come. I am sure the most fervent desire of this church is that the King may personally visit us. We trust he is with us, but we want him yet more fully to reveal himself. Our cry is, "Come, great King, with all thy glorious power, with thy Spirit and with thy glorious Son, and manifest thyself to us as thou dost not unto the world."

When the king came into the banqueting chamber *he saw the guests*, and they also saw him. It was a mutual revelation. Ever sweet is this to the saints, that their God looks upon them; his look brings no terror to our minds when we are loyal and loving. "Thou God seest me" is sweet music. We desire to abide for ever beneath the divine inspection, for it is an inspection of unbounded love. He sees our faults, it is to remove them; he notes our imperfections, it is to cleanse them away. Behold me, O great King, and lift up thine eyes upon me, accepting me in the Beloved. What joy it is to us who are saved in Christ Jesus that we also can see him! "Through a glass

darkly," I grant you we behold him, for as yet we are not fit to behold the full splendour of his Godhead! but yet how sweetly doth he reveal himself to our souls and unveil his eternal love. Then it is that the feast is most fully a banquet of wine, when the banner of love waves over us, and the king's voice fills us with unspeakable delight.

"The king came in to see his guests." This, I say, was the crowning point of the entire banquet. Observe, that he came in after they were in their places. They did not see him before they had entered his halls. When an inferior entertains a superior he always advances to the door to meet him and waits till he comes. If her Majesty the Queen were entertained by one of her nobles, he would be in waiting, and at the threshold would meet her; but when a superior entertains an inferior the inferior may take his seat at the table, and when all is ready the noble host will come in. It is so in the banquet of mercy. You and I see nothing of God, by way of communion with him, until first we have been brought in by the message of mercy to the marriage-feast of the gospel; for, indeed, until then a sight of God would strike us with terror:—

"Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind;

But when Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy, begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins."

When I get to the banquet of mercy, then it is that I can dare to look at the King of kings, but not till then. What a joyous sight, a vision of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory as he appears in the gospel, feasting us upon his fatlings. An incarnate God makes God visible to us and makes us happy in the sight. "How canst thou see my face and live?" was the old question, but, behold, it is answered this day. At the marriage union of Christ with his people we see the face of the King in his beauty, and our souls not only live, but we have life more abundantly.

Observe, dear brethren, that the King has special times for this. He is not always in the festal chamber; to our sorrow we sometimes miss the King's presence at his table. We have the ordinances always, but we do not always enjoy the God of ordinances. The means of grace are abiding, but the grace of the means will come and go according to the sovereign good pleasure of our God. The King has his times of coming in. These are glad times to his people, but they are trying times to the mass of professors. When are these times? So far as unworthy guests are concerned, the times of God's visitation are those seasons when character is manifested. All times and periods do not reveal character. A lion may lie all day asleep, you may scarce know but what it is tame; but when the night brings the time for it to go forth to its prey, then it howls, and displays its ferocity. And so an ungodly man may lie down in the church of God with the lambs of the flock, and nothing may lead you to suspect his true character, but when the time comes for him to make profit by sin, or to get pleasure by sin, or to escape from persecution by sin, then you find out

what he is. These providences are the King's coming in to scrutinise the guests. Changes in the conditions of the church, changes in the condition of the individual, all sorts of providential events go to make up the great sieve by which the wheat and the chaff are separated.

A great and most solemn coming in of the King to see the guests is, when having looked over the church, unknown to us, he decides that such and such a hypocrite has had space enough for repentance and time enough for mischief, and must now be summoned to the dread tribunal by death. The time when the King comes in to see his guests is not the last judgment, for that is the coming of the Son and not of the Father; and if it were intended in the parable, we should read that *the prince* came in to see his guests. We are led to view the King himself as continually judging professors and detecting the rebels who place themselves among the saints; by this judgment of God men are taken away from the church in their transgressions, bound hand and foot, and cast into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. I do not know, my dear brethren, when God may be visiting this church, and taking away the men that are rebels in our midst, but I do know that when professors die it is not certain that all of them sleep in Jesus, but some of them are rooted up, like tares from among the wheat, and are bound up in bundles to burn. The division is going on constantly. The King's presence is known to believers in the joy which they feel, but it is made known to hypocrites by his cutting them off and appointing them their portion in eternal woe.

If, however, there is any one time when we may be quite sure that the King comes in to see the guests, it is after large ingatherings from the world; for notice here, when the servants had gathered in guests in large numbers, it was then that the king came in. Now it will be after the time of revival which we are feeling just now, when I hope a great many will be added to the church, that the Lord will search and sift us. If there has been no visitation of the church before for purposes of love or judgment—for they go together—we shall be quite sure to have such a visit from the great Lord himself at this time.

III. Solemnly think of THE JUDGE AT THE FEAST. To all the rest at the festival he was the king, the beloved monarch, the munificent donor of a splendid banquet, and all eyes feasted as they looked at him: it was joy enough to behold the king in his beauty, and to see his Son with all his royal jewels on, attired for the wedding feast; but he was a judge to the hypocritical intruder. The day of comfort to his saints is also the day of vengeance of our God. He who comes to comfort all that mourn, comes at the same time to smite the rebellious with a rod of iron.

The judge begins, as you perceive, by *seeing*, "He saw there a man. What eyes are those of Omniscience! The parable represents but one such man as present, yet the All-seeing King saw him at once, he fixed his flaming eyes on that one. I suppose it was a greater crowd than this, but the king fixed his eyes on the solitary offender at once. Does the parable speak of only one because we may expect to find only one hypocrite in a church? Alas! there have been many such at the wedding feast, but one only is mentioned to show us that if there were but one, God would find him out; and, being many, the sinners in Zion may be the more sure that they will not escape. It is possible that

none of the guests may have noticed the man's garments; the parable makes no remark upon any expostulations made to him by others; perhaps they were all so taken up with the sight of the king, and so glad to be at the feast themselves, that they had no heart to make remarks upon others. But this is certain, that the king detected at once the absence of what was requisite to the marriage feast. It was not the presence of anything offensive, but the absence of something which was requisite. He did not say to the unworthy guest, "Thou hast rags upon thee," or "thou art filthy," or "thou hast an unwashed face:" he enquired solely into the absence of the peculiar badge which denoted a loving guest. God will judge, and does continually judge his church upon this question, the absence of what is absolutely necessary to being a Christian, the absence of honouring the Son, and obeying the Father. O soul, if thou art a professor of religion, and yet dost not love Jesus, and dost not fear the great King of kings, thou lackest the wedding robe, and what dost thou here? The king will see at once that thou lackest it. Thy morality, thy generosity, thy high sounding prayers, ay, and even thine eloquent discoursings, these cannot conceal from him the fact that thy heart is not with him. The one thing needful is to accept loyally the Lord as King.

The king next began to deal with the rebel. Note how he spoke with him. He took him on his own ground. It was too high a day for the king to use rough speech; the man pretended to be a friend, and he addressed him as such, but though the word I doubt not was uttered softly, it must have stung him if he had any feeling left. Judas exemplified in his own person this character. When he gave the Saviour the traitor's kiss, our Lord addressed him as "friend." He pretended to be a friend. A friend, indeed, to insult his king at his own table, and to select for the insult the delicate occasion of the prince's marriage to which he had been hospitably invited! This was infamous! Friend indeed! Where will you find enemies if such shall be called friends? The king put it to him, "How camest thou in hither? What business hast thou here? What could have induced thee so maliciously to defy me? To smite me in my tenderest point, and mock my guests, and trample on my son? Didst thou intend such daring insolence? "How camest thou in hither? In *hither?* Was there nowhere else to pour forth thy sedition, no other spot in which to play the traitor? Needest thou come into my palace, and to my table, and before my son on his wedding day reveal thy enmity? Was there a need to do this?" So may the Lord say to some of us. "Were there no other ways to sin, but that you must profess to be my servant when you were not so? Were there no other bowls that you could drink from, that ye must profane the cups of my table? Was there no other bread that you could put into your wicked mouths but the bread that represents the body of my Son? Had you nowhere else to sin in that you must needs sin in the church? Could you do nothing else to show your spite but that you must make a lying profession of faith in my Son, who bled upon the cross to redeem the sons of men? Could you assail me nowhere else but through the wounds of my only-begotten Son? Could you vex my Spirit by no other means than by pretending to be my friend, and thrusting yourself in hither, while defiantly rejecting that which was necessary to do me honour, and to do my

Son honour, at the festival of my grace?" I dare not dwell upon the topic. I give you the text; I pray that your conscience may preach the sermon.

Notice, however, one thing, and that is, that the king, when he thus turned a judge, dealt with this man only about himself. "How camest *thou* in hither?" Did I hear a whisper in some one's mind, "Well, if I am unfit to be a church member, there are a great many others who are in the same condemnation." What is that to thee? See thou to thyself! When the king came in to see the guests he did not say to this man, "How came yonder persons here without the wedding garment?" His dealings were personal with him alone: "How camest *thou* in hither, not having on the wedding garment?" Professor, look to thyself, look to thyself. Let thy charity begin at home. Cast out the beam from thine own eye, and then mayst thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. He fixed on the one man, made him his entire audience, and directed to him the solemn question, "Friend, how camest thou in hither?" Ah, my dear hearers, as the pastor of this church it has been a very great joy to me to see our numbers increased; many have been added to us, and many have gone forth from us to form other churches; my joy has been constant in God concerning this matter. Our beloved brethren associated with me in office have done their best to keep any of you back who have sought membership in whom we could see no fruits corresponding. We have not used our office deceitfully; as in the sight of God we have tried to be neither too severe nor too lax, but for all that I cannot but know that there are some of you who are not Christians though you bear the name. Like those of old, you say you are Jews and are not, but do lie. I am not now speaking of any who have fallen into sin and have suffered our rebuke, or have been separated from us by excommunication and yet remain in the congregation; I mean others of you whose lives are all that could be desired openly, and yet there is a worm at the heart of your profession; you are not vitally godly, you have a name to live, and you keep that name untarnished as yet, but you are dead. Search ye yourselves; do not from this tabernacle descend into hell; let your prayer be, "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men." I am as concerned about myself as about you, that I should be found "accepted in the Beloved;" lest after having preached to others I myself should be a castaway! Do let it be a matter of solemn anxiety with each one. If you have never come to Jesus, come now; if you have never sought holiness of life, seek it now. If you have never had the wedding garment, it is yet procurable; go ye to him who freely gives it, the Lord will not refuse you; go to-day and he will accept you.

IV. He w o was the unworthy guest is now THE CRIMINAL AT THE FEAST. The king has now become a judge to him; the question has been personally put to him, and he is *speechless*. Why is he silent? Surely it was because he was convicted of open, undeniable disloyalty. No evidence was required; he had come there on set purpose with malice aforethought to display his disloyalty, and had done so in the presence of the King. I do not think he represents at all a person who enters the church through ignorance, with a sincere but ignorant intention, but he pourtrays one who makes a profession without care to

make it true—wilfully despising the Lord's commands. He is a man willing to be saved by grace, and professing to be so, but refusing to acknowledge his duty to God and his obligations to the Son. He was speechless; he could not have chosen a worse place, nor a more impertinent method of ventilating his disloyalty than that which he selected; there was nothing he could say in self-defence. At that moment, when the King looked him through and through, he saw the full horror of his position; his loins were loosed, like Belshazzar of old when he saw the handwriting on the wall; he saw now that his time to insult was over, and the day of retribution had come. He was taken in the very fact, and could not escape. He had been guilty of a superfluity of naughtiness, of an unnecessary extravagance of wickedness in coming into the feast to air his pride. He had committed a suicidal intrusion. He might have kept himself away at any rate, and not have thrust himself into the Judge's presence. He saw now that the cause of sedition was hopeless, the King was there and he was in his power and none could rescue him. Why did he not burst into tears? why did he not confess the wrong? why did he not say, "My King, I have insulted thee, have pity upon me?" His proud heart would not let him. Sin made him incapable of repentance. There is a verse in one of Hart's hymns which runs thus—

> "Fixed is their everlasting state:
> Could they repent, 'tis now too late."

That is true enough, but it supposes an impossibility, and I think it would have been far better to have said—

> "Fixed is their everlasting state;
> They can't repent, 'tis now too late."

Because the sinner goes on to sin he continues still to suffer; he will not turn, he cannot turn. As the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, so when sin has reached its height the man cannot bend, or bow, or retrace his steps. Oh, if he could have repented even then! But he could not; and the tears that came after the king had pronounced the sentence were no tears of penitence, but only of despairing pride. He stood speechless. It was not only that he had no excuse, but he would not confess his wrong. Have I any one here in such a condition of heart, that while he has been sinning by making a false profession, and knows it, yet he sullenly refuses to confess his fault? Yield thee, man! Yield at once. Fall at the King's feet at once. Even if you are not a hypocrite, if you have any suspicion that you are, fall down and say, "My King, make me sincere; I submit myself to thy will, and am ready to put on the wedding badge; if there is any method by which I can honour thy Son, I cavil not at it; let me wear his colours, and be known by all men to be truly a lover of the great Prince."

V. But now, lastly, while he stood speechless in the king's presence, the king gave place to THE EXECUTIONER, for he uttered these words, "*Bind him hand and foot.*" He was lawless, make him feel the law; he said, "I am free, and I will do as I like," let him never be free again; bind him, pinion him. Executioner, do your duty, prepare him for death. Alas there are some who are bound and pinioned

even before the breath is out of their bodies. In their dying hours false professors have often found that they could not pray, and could not repent; like dying Spira, that arch-hypocrite and apostate, they have been sensible of misery, but not penitent, and no gospel promise has availed to comfort them. Their hearts were seared, they were twice dead before they were dead: Then came the sentence, "*Take him away*," which is sometimes executed by the church in her excommunications—deceivers are taken away from the gospel feast by just discipline; but which is more fully carried out in the hour of death, when the man's hope fails him. Ah, sirs, what will ye do if ye have no true grace in your hearts when you are taken away from the Lord's table, taken away from the baptism in which you gloried, taken away from the doctrines of the gospel which you understood so well by head, but which you did not know in your heart. John Bunyan's description of the man dragged by seven devils, bound with cords, comes up before my mind. "Bind him hand and foot and take him away." How thankful I am that the servants who brought them in are not the same who were commanded to take them away. The *Douloi* brought them in, the *diakonoi* took them away, the king has a special order of servants for the taking of deceivers away; his angels do that in the hour of death—they execute his vengeance. He gives us ministers a better office, he bids us be his heralds of mercy. Then the judge said, "*Cast him*," fling him like a useless, worthless thing. That wretch has dared pollute my marriage feast, cast him away, as men fling weeds over the garden wall or shake off vipers into the fire. There is none in heaven or earth thought more despicable, more fit to be thrown away as rubbish and offal, than a man who had a Christian name, but had not the essentials of the Christian's nature. Cast him away. Where? "*Into outer darkness*" far from the banquet hall where torches flame and lamps are bright; drive him out into the cold, chilly midnight air. He has once seen the light, it will be all the darker now for him when he is driven into the dark. There is no darkness so dark as the darkness of the man who once saw light. Cast him into the outer darkness. What will he do there? We are not told what would be done *to* him, it was not needful, we learn elsewhere as much as could be revealed to us, but we are told *what he did*, for "there shall be weeping," not the gush of tears which gives relief but the everlasting dropping of scalding tears which create fresh sorrow and enlarge their own source. The outcast shed no tears of regret, but of sullen disappointment, because he could not after all dishonour the king; and had even served to illustrate the royal justice and power, and so had brought glory to the king whom he hated in soul. Then came the "gnashing of teeth," caused by wrath and envy because he could do no more mischief. No sorrow is equal to that of a malicious spirit, that having attempted a daring deed of atrocious wickedness, has been defeated and has contributed to the triumph of the good and excellent. The misery of hell is not a misery which God arbitrarily creates, it is the necessary result of sin, it is sin itself come to ripeness. Here you see the picture of the man who was insolent enough to come into the church without being a Christian, and now for ever he gnashes with his teeth against that glorious Majesty of heaven which it will never be in his power to

injure, but which it will always be in his heart to hate; and this will be his hell—that he hates God, this his darkness—that he cannot see beauty in God, and this the outerness of the darkness—that he cannot enter into God's will. "Depart ye cursed," is only love repelling that which is not lovely, it is only justice giving to man what his fallen nature craved after. "Get away from me, ye did not honor me; when ye did come to me it was with your lips only. Go where your hearts were; depart from me, ye cursed." Oh, may God grant that not one here may come under the lash of this terrible parable, but may we be found of the Lord in peace in the day of his appearing. You see, then, how the Lord sifts us. First, we are sifted by the preaching of the gospel, and many will not come—there is one heap of chaff: next, by the judgment of God in his church, and others are found wanting —there is another heap of chaff. Ah, when this is done, and the two great sieves are used, shall we be found among the wheat?

Do you say, "the sermon has nothing to do with me, I never made a profession, I shall go home easy enough." Come hither friend, I must not let you go. There is a vagabond brought before the magistrate accused of theft, he says he is perfectly innocent, but he is convicted, and has to suffer for it; after him comes a bragging fellow, who says, "I do not make any profession of being honest, I rob anybody I can, and I mean to do so, I do not pretend to keep the law." Why, methinks the magistrate would say, "I condemned the man who did at least pretend to something decent, but to you I give double punishment, you are evidently incorrigible, and your case needs no consideration." You who do not say you are christians, who confess you are not, you avow yourselves the enemies of Christ; get no comfort therefore out of this parable I pray you, but yield yourselves to the Saviour, and believe in him, for he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved.

Unprofitable Servants

"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"—Matthew xxv. 30.

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do"—Luke xvii. 10.

"His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant"—Matthew xxv. 21.

THERE is a narrow path between indifference and morbid sensibility. Some men seem to feel no holy anxiety: they place their Master's talent in the earth, leave it there, and take their pleasure and their ease without a moment's compunction. Others profess to be so anxious to be right that they come to the conclusion that they can never be so, and fall under a horror of God, viewing his service as a drudgery, and himself as a hard master—though probably they never say so. Between these two lines there is a path, narrow as a razor's edge, which only the grace of God can enable us to trace; it is free alike from carelessness and from bondage, and consists in a sense of responsibility bravely borne by the help of the Holy Spirit. The right way usually lies between two extremes: it is the narrow channel between the rock and the whirlpool. There is a sacred way which runs between self-congratulation and despondency, a very difficult track to find, and very hard to keep. There are great perils in the consciousness that you have done well, and that you are serving God with all your might; for you may come to think that you are a deserving person, worthy to rank among the princes of Israel. The danger of being puffed up can hardly be overestimated: a dizzy head soon brings a fall. But perhaps equally to be dreaded on the other side is that sense of unworthiness which paralyzes all exertion, making you feel that you are incapable of anything that is great or good. Under this impulse have men fled from the service of God into a life of solitude; they felt that they could not behave valiantly in the battle of life, and therefore they fled from the field before the fight began, to become hermits or monks; as if it were possible to do the Lord's perfect will by doing nothing at all, and to discharge the duties to which they were born by an unnatural mode of existence. Blessed is that man who finds the strait and narrow way between

high thoughts of self and hard thoughts of God, between self-esteem and a timid shrinking from all effort. My desire is that the Spirit of God may guide our minds into the golden mean where holy graces blend, and the contending vices, equally natural to our evil hearts, are all excluded. May the Spirit of God bless our three texts and the three subjects suggested by them, so that we may be put right, and then by infinite mercy may be kept right until the great day of account.

Let us read Matthew xxv. 30.

"And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In this our first text we have THE VERDICT OF JUSTICE upon the man who did not use his talent. The man is here styled an "unprofitable servant" because he was slothful, useless, worthless. He did not bring his master interest for his money nor render him any sincere service. He did not faithfully discharge the trust reposed in him as his fellow servants did.

Notice, first, that *this unprofitable person was a servant.* He never denied that he was a servant; in fact, it was by his position as a servant that he became possessed of his one talent, and to that possession he never demurred. If he had been capable of receiving more, there is no reason why he should not have had two talents, or five; for the Scripture tells us that the master gave to every man according to his several ability. He owned the rule of his master even in the act of burying the talent, and in appearing before him to give an account. This makes the subject the more heart-searching for you and for me; for we, too, profess to be servants—servants of the Lord our God. Judgment must begin at the house of God; that is, with those who are in the house of the Lord as children and servants: let us, therefore, look well to our goings. If judgment first begin at us, "what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" If this in our text be judgment upon servants, what will be the judgment upon enemies? This man acknowledged that he was a servant even to the last; and though he was impertinent and impudent enough to express a most wicked and slanderous opinion about his master, yet he neither denied his own position as a servant, nor the fact that his talent was his lord's, for he said, "Lo, there thou hast that is thine." In thus speaking he went rather further than some professing Christians do, for they live as if Christianity were all eating the fat and drinking the sweet and not serving at all; as if religion had many privileges but no precepts, and as if, when men were saved, they became licensed loiterers to whom it is a matter of honour to magnify free grace by standing all the day idle in the market-place. Alas, I know some who never do a hand's turn for Christ, and yet call him Master and Lord. Ill will it fare with them at his coming. Many of us acknowledge that we are servants, that everything we have belongs to our Master, and that we are bound to live for him. So far, so good; but we may get as far as that, and yet in the end we may be found unprofitable servants, and so be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Let us take heed of this.

This man, though a servant, *thought ill of his master,* and disliked his

service: he said, "I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed." Certain professors who have stolen into the church are of the same mind: they dare not say that they regret their having joined the church, and yet they so act that all may conclude that if it could be undone they would not do the like again. They do not find pleasure in the service of God, but continue to pursue its routine as a matter of habit or a hard obligation. They get into the spirit of the elder brother, and they say, "Lo; these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandments, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." They sit down on the shady side of godliness, and never bask in the sun which shines full upon it. They forget that the father said to the elder son, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." He might have had as many feastings, as many lambs and kids as he desired, he would have been denied no good thing. The presence of his father ought to have been his joy and his delight; and better than all merry-makings with his friends; and it would have been so if he had been in a proper state of heart. The man who hid his talent had carried the evil and petulant spirit much further than that elder brother; but the germs are the same, and we must mind that we crush them at the beginning.

This unprofitable servant looked upon his master as one that reaped where he never sowed, and used the rake to gather together what he had never scattered: he meant that he was a hard, exacting, and unjust person, whom it was difficult to please. He judged his lord to be one who expected more of his servants than he had any right to look for, and he had such a hatred of his unjust conduct that he resolved to tell him to his face what he thought of him. This spirit may readily creep over the minds of professors; I fear it is brooding over many even now, for they are not content with Christ. If they want pleasure they go outside the church to get it: their joys are not within the circle of which Christ is the centre. Their religion is their labour, not their delight; their God is their dread, not their joy. They do not delight themselves in the Lord, and therefore he does not give them the desire of their hearts, and so they grow more and more discontented. They could not call him "God, mine exceeding joy," and so he is a terror to them. Devotion is a dreary engagement to them; they wish that they could escape from it with an easy conscience. They do not say as much to their secret selves: but you can read between the lines these words—"What a weariness it is." It is no wonder when things come to this pass that a professor becomes an unprofitable servant; for who can do a work well which he hates to do? Forced service is not desirable. God wants not slaves to grace his throne. A servant who is not pleased with his situation had better leave; if he is not content with his Master he had better find another, for their mutual relationship will be unpleasant and unprofitable. When it comes to this, that you and I are discontented with our God, and dissatisfied with his work, we had better look out for another lord, if any such will have us, for we shall certainly be unprofitable to the Lord Jesus from our want of love to him.

Note next, that, albeit this man was doing nothing for his master, *he did not think himself an unprofitable servant.* He exhibited no self-depreciation, no humbling, no contrition. He was as bold as brass, and said unblushingly, "Lo, there thou hast that is thine." He came before his master with no apologies or excuses. He did not join with those who have done all, and then say, "We are unprofitable servants"; for he felt that he had dealt with his Lord as the justice of the case deserved; indeed, instead of acknowledging any fault he turned to accusing his lord. It is even so with false professors. They have no idea that they are hypocrites, the thought does not cross their minds. They have no notion that they are unfaithful. Hint at it, and see how they will defend themselves. If they are not living as they ought to do, they claim to be pitied rather than blamed; the blame lies with Providence; it is the fault of circumstances: it is the fault of anybody but themselves. They have done nothing, and yet they feel more at ease than those who have done everything. They have taken the trouble to dig in the earth and hide their talent, and they as good as ask—what more do you want? Is God so exacting as to expect me to bring more to him than he gave me? I am as grateful and prayerful as God makes me—what more will he require? There is you see no bowing in the dust with a sense of imperfection, but an arrogant casting upon God of all blame; and this, too, under the pretence of honouring his sovereign grace! Ah me! that men should be able to torture truth into such presumptuous falsehood.

Mark well, that the verdict of justice at last may turn out to be the very opposite of that which we pronounce upon ourselves. He who proudly thinks himself profitable shall be found unprofitable, and he who modestly judges himself to be unprofitable may in the end come to hear his Master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." So little are we able, through the defects of our conscience, to form a right estimate of ourselves, that we frequently reckon ourselves to be rich and increased in goods, and having need of nothing, when, indeed, we are naked, and poor, and miserable. Such was the case with this unfaithful servant: he wrapped himself up in the conceit that he was even more just than his lord, and had an argument to plead which he thought would exonerate him from all blame.

It should give rise to much searching of heart when we notice *what this unprofitable servant did, or, rather, what he did not do.* He carefully deposited his capital where no one was able to find it and steal it; and there was an end of his service. We ought to observe that he did not spend that talent upon himself, or use it in business for his own benefit. He was not a thief, nor in any way a misappropriator of moneys placed under his charge. In this he excels many who profess to be the servants of God, and yet live to themselves only. What little talent they have is used in their own business, and never upon their Lord's concerns. They have the power of getting money, but their money is not made for Christ; such an idea never occurs to them. Their efforts are all for themselves, or—to use other words to express the same thing—*for* their families. Yonder is a man who has the gift of eloquent speech, and he uses it, not for Christ, but for himself, that he may win popularity, that he might arrive at a respectable position: the one end and object of his

most earnest speech is to bring grist to his own mill, and gain to his own estate. Everywhere this is to be seen amongst professors, that they are living to themselves: they are not adulterers or drunkards, far from it; neither are they thieves or spendthrifts; they are decent, orderly, quiet sort of people; but still, they begin and end with self. What is this but to be an unprofitable servant? What is a servant to me if he works hard for himself and does nothing for me? A professing Christian may toil till he becomes a rich man, an alderman in the City, a Lord Mayor, a member of Parliament, a millionaire; but what does that prove? Why, that he could work and did work well for himself; and if all this while he has done little or nothing for Christ, he is all the more condemned by his own success: if he had worked for his Lord as he worked for himself, what might he not have accomplished? The unprofitable servant in the parable was not so bad as that: and yet he was cast into outer darkness. What then will become of some of you?

Furthermore, the wicked servant did not go and mis-spend his talent: he did not waste it in self-indulgence and wickedness as the prodigal son did, who spent his substance in riotous living. Oh, no; he was a much better man than that. He would not waste a halfpenny; he was all for saving and running no risks. The talent was as he received it, only wrapped up in a napkin and hidden in the earth—put into a bank, in fact, but a bank which gave no interest. He never touched a penny of it for a feast or a revel, and therefore could not be accused of being a spendthrift with his lord's money; in all which he was superior to those who yield their strength to sin, and use their abilities to gratify the guilty passions of themselves and others.

I grieve to add that some who call themselves servants of Christ lay out their strength to undermine the gospel they profess to teach; they speak against the holy name by which they are named, and thus they use their talent against their Master. This man did not do so; he was bad enough in heart for anything, but he had never openly become so base a traitor. He never employed learning in order to raise needless doubts, or to resist the plain doctrines of the word of God; this has been reserved for divines of these latter days—days which produce monsters unknown to less educated times.

This man's talent had not been wasted under his hand, it was as he had received it, and he therefore reckoned he had been faithful. Ah! but this is not what Christ calls faithfulness—just to keep where we are. If you think you have grace and only keep what you have, without obtaining more, it will be hiding your talent in the earth and keeping it a barren thing. It is not enough to retain; you must advance. The capital may be there, but where is the interest? To be living without aim or purpose beyond that of keeping up your position is to be a wicked and slothful servant, condemned already. While meditating upon this subject may we each one say to himself, "Lord, is it I?"

His lord called this servant "wicked." Is it, then, a wicked thing to be unprofitable? Surely wickedness must mean some positive action. No. Not to do right is to be wicked; not to live for Christ is to be wicked; not to be of use in the world is to be wicked; not to bring glory to the

name of the Lord is to be wicked; to be slothful is to be wicked. It is clear that there are many wicked people in the world who would not like to be called so. "Wicked and slothful;" these are the two words which are riveted together by the Lord Jesus, whose speech is always wise. A schoolboy was asked by his master "What are you doing, John?" He was called up; and thought to be quite clear by saying, "I was doing nothing, sir;" but his master answered, "That is the very thing for which I called you out, for you ought to have been doing the lesson which I set you." It will be no excuse at the last for you to cry, "I was doing nothing, sir!" Were not those on the left hand made to depart with a curse upon them because they did nothing? Is it not written: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." He who does nothing is a "wicked and slothful servant."

This man was condemned to outer darkness. Notice this: he was condemned to be *as he was*, for hell, in one light, may be described as the great Captain's saying, "As you were." "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." In another world there is permanence of character: enduring holiness is heaven, continual evil is hell. This man was outside of the family of his lord. He thought his lord a hard master, and so proved that he had no love to him, and that he was not really one of his household. He was outside in heart, and so his lord said to him, "Remain outside." Besides that, he was in the dark: he had wrong notions of his master; for his lord was not an austere and hard man, he did not gather where he had not strawed, nor reap where he had not sown. Therefore his lord said, "You are wilfully in the dark: abide there in the darkness which is outside." This man was envious: he could not endure his master's prosperity; he gnashed his teeth at the thought of it. He was sentenced to continue in that mind, and so to gnash his teeth for ever. This is a dreadful idea of eternal punishment, this permanence of character in an immortal spirit:—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." While the character of the ungodly will be permanent, it will also be more and more developed along its own lines: the bad points will become worse, and, with nothing to restrain it, evil will become viler still. In the next world, where there are no hindrances from the existence of a church and a gospel, the man will ripen to a more hideous maturity of enmity against God, and a more horrible degree of consequent misery. Sorrow is bound up with sin: abiding in sinfulness, a man must necessarily abide in wretchedness; for the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. What must it be to be for ever outside the family of God! Never to be God's child! For ever in the dark! Never to see the light of holy knowledge, and purity, and hope! For ever to gnash one's teeth with painful contempt and abhorrence of God, whom to hate is hell! O for grace to be made to love him, whom to love is heaven. The unprofitable servant had a dreadful wage to take when his master reckoned with him, but who can say that he had not well earned it? He had the due reward of his deeds. O our God! grant that such may not be the lot of any one of us!

I must now call your attention to the second text:—

"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."—Luke xvii. 10.

This is THE VERDICT OF SELF-ABASEMENT, given forth from the heart of servants who had laboriously discharged the full work of the day. This is a part of a parable intended to rebuke all notions of self-importance and human merit. When a servant has been ploughing or feeding cattle, his master does not say to him, "Sit down, and I will wait upon you, for I am deeply in your debt." No, his master bids him prepare the evening meal and wait upon him. His services are due, and therefore his master does not praise him as if he were a wonder and a hero. He is only doing his duty if he perseveres from morning light to set of sun, and he by no means expects to have his work held up to admiration or rewarded with extra pay and humble thanks. Neither are we to boast of our services, but think little of them, confessing that we are unprofitable servants.

Whatever of pain may have been caused by the first part of the discourse, I trust it will only prepare us the more deeply to enter into the spirit of our second text. Both these texts are graven on my heart as with an iron pen, by a merciless wound, inflicted when I was too feeble to bear it. When I was exceedingly ill in the South of France, and deeply depressed in spirit—so deeply depressed and so sick and ill that I scarce knew how to live,—one of those malicious persons who commonly haunt all public men, and especially ministers, sent me anonymously a letter, openly directed to "*That unprofitable servant C. H. Spurgeon.*" This letter contained tracts directed to the enemies of the Lord Jesus, with passages marked and underlined, with notes applying them to myself. How many Rabshekahs have in their day written to me! Ordinarily I read them with the patience which comes of use, and they go to light the fire. I do not look for exemption from this annoyance, nor do I usually feel it hard to bear, but in the hour when my spirits were depressed, and I was in terrible pain, this reviling letter cut me to the quick. I turned upon my bed and asked—Am I, then, an unprofitable servant? I grieved exceedingly, and could not lift up my head, or find rest. I reviewed my life, and saw its infirmities and imperfections, but knew not how to put my case till this second text came to my relief, and answered as the verdict of my bruised heart. I said to myself, "I hope I am not an unprofitable servant in the sense in which this person intends to call me so; but I am assuredly so in the other sense." I cast myself upon my Lord and Master once again with a deeper sense of the meaning of the text than I had felt before: his atoning sacrifice revived me, and in humble faith I found rest. By the way, I wonder that any human being should find pleasure in trying to inflict pain upon those who are sick and depressed; yet are there persons who delight to do so. Surely, if there are no evil spirits down below, there are some up above, and the servants of the Lord Jesus receive painful proofs of their activity. Let me, then, if you have felt any pain from the first text lead you to the point at which I personally arrived when at last I could thank God for that letter, and feel that it was salutary medicine to my spirit.

This which is put into our mouths as a confession that we are unprofitable servants is meant to rebuke us when we think we are somebody, and have done somewhat worthy of praise. Our text is meant to rebuke us if we think that we have done enough, that we have borne the burden and heat of the day a long time, and have been kept at our post beyond our own watch. If we conclude that we have achieved a fine day's work of harvesting, and ought to be invited home to rest, the text upbraids us. If we feel an inordinate covetousness after comfort, and wish the Lord would give us some present and striking reward for what we have done, the text shames us. This is a proud, unchildlike, unservantlike spirit, and it must be put down with a firm hand.

In the first place, *in what way can we have profited God?* Eliphaz has well said, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" If we have given to God of our substance, is he our debtor? In what way have we enriched him to whom all the silver and gold belongs? If we have laid our lives out with the devotion of martyrs and missionaries for his sake, what is that to him, whose glory fills the heavens and the earth? How can we dream of putting the Eternal in debt to us? The right spirit is to say with David, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." How can a man place his Maker under an obligation to him? Let us not dote so blasphemously.

Dear brethren, we ought to recollect that *whatever service we have been able to render has been a matter of debt.* I hope our morality is not fallen so low that we take credit to ourselves for paying our debts. I do not find men in business priding themselves and saying, "I paid a thousand pounds this morning to such an one." "Well, did you give it to him?" "Oh no; it was all owing to him." Is that any great thing? Have we come to such a low state of spiritual morals that we think we have done a great deal when we give to God his due? "It is he that made us, and not we ourselves." Jesus Christ has bought us: "we are not our own," for we are "bought with a price." We have also entered into covenant with him, and given ourselves over to him voluntarily. Were we not baptized into his name and into his death? Whatever we may do is only what he has a right to claim at our hands from our creation, redemption, and professed surrender to him. When we have persevered in the hard work of ploughing till no field is left untilled, when we have done the pleasanter work of feeding the sheep and when we have finished by spreading the table of communion for our Lord: when we have done all we have done no more than was our duty to have done. Why boast we, then, or cry for a discharge, or look for thanks?

Over and above this there is the sad reflection that, alas, *in all we have done we have been unprofitable through being imperfect.* In the ploughing there have been baulks, in the feeding of the cattle there have been harshness and forgetfulness, in the spreading of the table the viands have been unworthy of such a Lord as we serve. How must our service

appear to him of whom we read, "Behold, he put no trust in his servants, and his angels he charged with folly." Can any of you look back upon your service of your Lord with satisfaction? If you can, I cannot say I envy you, for I do not sympathise with you in the least degree, but tremble for your safety. As for myself, I am compelled to say with solemn truthfulness that I am not content with anything I have ever done. I have half wished to live my life over again, but now I regret that my proud heart allowed me so to wish, since the probabilities are that I should do worse the second time. Whatever grace has done for me I acknowledge with deep gratitude; but so far as I have done anything myself I beg pardon for it. I pray God to forgive my prayers, for they have been full of fault; I beseech him to forgive even this confession, for it is not as humble as it ought to be; I beseech him to wash my tears and purge my devotions, and to baptize me into a true burial with my Saviour, that I may be quite forgotten in myself, and only remembered in him. Ah, Lord, thou knowest how far we fall short of the humility we ought to feel. Pardon us in this thing. We are all of us unprofitable servants, and if thou shouldst judge us by the law we must be cast away.

Once more, we cannot congratulate ourselves at all, even if we have had success in our Lord's work, since *for all that we have done we are indebted to our Lord's abundant grace.* If we had done all our duty, we should not have done anything if his grace had not enabled us to do it. If our zeal no respite knows, it is he that keeps the fire burning. If our tears of repentance flow, it is he that strikes the rock and fetches the waters from it. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, if there be any faith, if there be any ardour, if there be any likeness to Christ, we are his workmanship, created by him, and therefore to ourselves we dare not take a particle of the praise. Of thine own have we given unto thee, great God! So far as anything has been worth thine accepting, it was thine own beforehand. Hence the best are still unprofitable servants.

If we have special cause of regret because of some evident error, we shall be wise to go in a lowly spirit and confess the fault, and then go on doing the work of each day in a plodding, hopeful spirit. Whenever you get distressed because you cannot do what you would; whenever you see the faultiness of your own service, and condemn yourself for it, the best thing is to go and do something more in the strength of the Lord. If you have not served Jesus well up to now, go and do better. If you make a blunder do not tell everybody, and say that you will never try again, but do two good things to make up for the failure. Say, "My blessed Lord and Master shall not be more a loser by me than I can help. I will not so much fret over the past as amend the present and wake up for the future." Brethren, try to be more profitable, and ask for more grace. The servant's business is not to hide himself in a corner of the field and cry, but to go on ploughing; not to bleat with sheep, but feed them, and so prove your love to Jesus. You are not to stand at the head of the table and say, "I have not spread the table for my Master so well as I could have desired." No, go and spread it better. Have courage; you are not serving a hard Master after all; and, though you very properly call yourself an unprofitable servant, be of good cheer, for a gentler

verdict shall be pronounced upon you ere long. You are not your own judge either for good or ill; another judge is at the door, and when he cometh he will think better of you than your self-abasement permits you to think of yourself: he will judge you by the rule of grace and not by law, and he will end all that dread which comes of a legal spirit and hovers over you with vampire wings.

Thus I have brought you to the third text,

"His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant." —Matthew xxv. 21.

I shall not try to preach upon that cheering word, but shall only say a word or two upon it. It is much too grand a text to be treated upon at the end of a sermon. We find the Lord saying to those who had used their talents industriously, "Well done, good and faithful servant." This is THE VERDICT OF GRACE. Blessed is the man who shall own himself to be an unfaithful servant; and blessed is the man to whom his Lord shall say, "Thou good and faithful servant."

Observe here that the "Well done" of the Master is *given to faithfulness*. It is not "Well done, thou good and brilliant servant;" for perhaps the man never shone at all in the eyes of those who appreciate glare and glitter. It is not, "Well done, thou great and distinguished servant;" for it is possible that he was never known beyond his native village. He conscientiously did his best with his "few things," and never wasted an opportunity for doing good, and thus he proved himself faithful.

The same praise was given to the man with two talents as to his fellow-servant with five. Their stations were very different; but their reward was the same. "Well done, good and faithful servant," was won and enjoyed by each of them. Is it not very sweet to think that though I may have only one talent I shall not thereby be debarred from my Lord's praise? It is my faithfulness on which he will fix his eye, and not upon the number of my talents. I may have made many mistakes, and have confessed my faults with great grief; but he will commend me as he did the woman of whom he said, "She hath done what she could." It is better to be faithful in the infant-school than to be unfaithful in a noble class of young men. Better to be faithful in a hamlet over two or three score of people, than to be unfaithful in a great city parish, with thousands perishing in consequence. Better to be faithful in a cottage meeting, speaking of Christ crucified to half-a-hundred villagers, than to be unfaithful in a great building where thousands congregate. I pray you be faithful in laying out all that you are and have for God. As long as you live, whatever faults you have, be not half-hearted or double-minded, but be faithful in intent and desire. This is the point of the Judge's praise,—the servant's faithfulness.

This verdict was *given of sovereign grace*. The reward was not according to the work, for the servant had been "faithful in a few things," but he was made "ruler over many things." The verdict itself is not after the rule of works, but according to the law of grace. Our good works are evidences of grace within us; our faithfulness, therefore, as servants, will be the evidence of our having a loving spirit towards our Master,—evidence, therefore, that our heart is changed, and that we have

been made to love him for whom once we had no affection. Our works are the proof of our love, and hence they stand as evidence of the grace of God. God first gives us grace, and then rewards us for it. He works in us, and then counts the fruit as our work. We work out our own salvation, because "he worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." If he shall ever say, "Well done" to you and to me it will be because of his own rich grace, and not because of our merits. And, indeed, this is where we must all come and where we must all keep; for the idea that we have any personal merit will soon make us find fault with our Master, and his service, as being austere and hard.

I have sometimes admired how men who have denied the doctrine of salvation by grace, as a matter of theology, have, nevertheless, admitted it in their devotions. They have entered into controversy against it, and yet unconsciously they have believed it. An extreme case is that of Cardinal Bellarmine, who was one of the most inveterate enemies of the Reformation, and a renowned antagonist of the teaching of Martin Luther. I will quote from one of his works (*Inst. De Justificatione, Lib. v., c.* 1). He says, in summing up, "On account of the uncertain nature of our own works and the danger of vain-glory, it is the safest course to place our whole trust in the mercy and loving-kindness of God." Thou hast well said, O Cardinal; and since the safest course is that which we would choose, we will place our whole trust in the mercy and loving-kindness of God. It is reported, and I believe on excellent authority, that this great man, who had all his life long been crying up salvation by works, when dying, breathed a prayer in Latin, the translation of which would be something like this: "I beseech God, who weighs not our merits, but graciously pardons our offences, that he would receive me among his saints and his elect." Is Saul also among the prophets? Does Bellarmine at the last pray like a Calvinist? Such a case makes one hope that many others may be saved in an apostate church. Thank God, many are a great deal better than their creed, and in their hearts believe what, as polemical theologians, they deny. However this may be, I know that if I am saved or rewarded it must be of grace alone, for I can have no other hope. As for those who have done much for the church, we know that they will disclaim all praise, saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and gave thee meat; or thirsty and gave thee drink?" All the Lord's faithful servants will sing, "*Non nobis domine.*" Not unto us. Not unto us.

Lastly, brethren, with what infinite delight will Jesus fill our hearts if, through divine grace, we are happy enough to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Oh, if we shall hold on to the end despite the temptations of Satan, and the weakness of our nature, and all the entanglements of the world, and keep our garments unspotted from the world, preaching Christ according to our measure of ability, and winning souls for him, what an honour it will be! What bliss for him to say, "Well done." The music of these two words will have heaven in them to us. How different it will be from the verdict of our fellow-men, who are often finding fault with this and that, though we do our best. We never could please them, but we have pleased our Lord. Men were always misinterpreting our words and misjudging our motives, but he sets all right by saying, "Well done!" Little will it matter then what

all the rest have said: neither the flattering words of friends nor the harsh condemnations of enemies will have any weight with us when he says, "Well done!" Not with pride shall we receive that eulogium; for we shall reckon ourselves even then to have been unprofitable servants; but oh how we shall love him for setting such an estimate upon the cups of cold water we gave to his disciples, and the poor broken service we tried to render him. What condescension to call that well done which we feel was so ill done!

I pray God's servants here, who this morning first began with searching themselves, and then went on to confess their imperfections, now to close by rejoicing in the fact that, if we are believing in Christ Jesus, and are really consecrated to him, we shall conclude this life and begin the next with that blessed verdict of "Well done!" Mind, however, that you are those who are doing all and are faithful. I hear some people speak against self-righteousness, to whom I would say, "You need not say much about that matter, for it does not concern you, since you have no righteousness to be proud of." I hear persons speak against salvation by good works who are in no danger of falling into that error, since good works and their lives have long parted company. What I do admire is to see a man like Paul, who lived for Jesus, and was ready to die for him, yet saying at the close of his life, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Go on, brothers, and think not of resting till your day's work is done. Serve God with all your might. Do more than the Pharisees, who hope to be saved by their zeal. Do more than your brethren expect of you, and then, when you have done all, lay it at your Redeemer's feet with this confession, "I am an unprofitable servant." It is to those who blend faithfulness with humility and ardour with self-abasement that Jesus will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

The Two Talents

"He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"—Matthew xxv. 22. 23.

"EVERY good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." All that men have they must trace to the Great Fountain, the giver of all good. Hast thou talents? They were given thee by the God of talents. Hast thou time? hast thou wealth, influence, power? Hast thou powers of tongue? Hast thou powers of thought? Art thou poet, statesman, or philosopher? Whatever be thy position and whatever be thy gifts, remember that they are not thine, but they are lent thee from on high. No man hath anything of his own, except his sins. We are but tenants at will. God hath put us into his estates, and he hath said, "Occupy till I come." Though our vineyards bear never so much fruit, yet the vineyard belongs to the King, and though we are to take the hundred for our hire, yet King Solomon must have his thousand. All the honour of our ability and the use of it must be unto God, because he is the Giver. The parable tells us this very pointedly; for it makes every person acknowledge that his talents come from the Lord. Even the man who digged in the earth and hid his Lord's money, did not deny that his talent belonged to his Master; for though his reply, "Lo, there thou hast that is thine," was exceedingly impertinent, yet it was not a denial of this fact. So that even this man was ahead of those who deny their obligations to God, who superciliously toss their heads at the very mention of obedience to their Creator, and spend their time and their powers rather in rebellion against him than in his service. Oh, that we were all wise to believe and to act upon this most evident of all truths, that everything we have, we have received from the Most High.

Now, there are some men in the world who have but few talents. Our parable says, "One had five, and another two." To them I shall address myself this morning; and I pray that the few pointed things I may say, may be blessed of God to their edification or rebuke. First, I shall notice *the fact that there are many persons who have but few talents*, and I will try to account for God's dispensing but few to them. Secondly, I shall remind them that *even for these few talents they must be brought to account.* And thirdly, I shall conclude, by making the comforting observation, that *if our few talents be rightly used, neither our own conscience nor our Master's judgment shall condemn us for not having more.*

I. First, then, GOD HAS MADE SOME MEN WITH FEW TALENTS. You very often hear men speak of one another as if God had made no mental differences at all. One man finds himself successful, and he supposes that if everyone else could have been as industrious and as persevering as himself, everyone must necessarily have been as successful. You will often hear remarks against ministers who are godly and earnest men, but who do not happen to have much attracting power, and they are called drones and lazy persons, because they cannot make much of a stir in the

world, whereas the reason may be, that they have but little talent, and are making the best use of what they have, and therefore ought not to be rebuked for the littleness of what they are able to accomplish. It is a fact, which every man must see, that even in our birth there is a difference. All children are not alike precocious, and all men certainly are not alike capable of learning or of teaching. God hath made eminent and marvellous differences. We are not to suppose that all the difference between a Milton and a man who lives and dies without being able to read, has been caused by education. There was doubtless a difference originally, and though education will do much, it cannot do everything. Fertile ground, when well-tilled, will necessarily bring forth more than the best tilled estate, the soil of which is hard and sterile. God has made great and decided differences; and we ought, in dealing with our fellow men, to recollect this, lest we should say harsh things of those very men to whom God will afterwards say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

But why is it that God has not given to all men like talents? My first answer shall be, because God is a Sovereign, and of all attributes, next to his love, God is the most fond of displaying his sovereignty. The Lord God will have men know that he has a right to do what he wills with his own. Hence it is, that in salvation he gives it to some and not to others; and his only reply to any accusation of injustice is, "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" The worm is not to murmur because God did not make it an angel, and the fish that swims the sea must not complain because it hath not wings to fly into the highest heavens. God had a right to make his creatures just what he pleased, and though men may dispute his right, he will hold and keep it inviolate against all comers. That he may hedge his right about and make vain man acknowledge it, in all his gifts he continually reminds us of his sovereignty. "I will give to this man," he says, "a mind so acute that he shall pry into all secrets; I will make another so obtuse that none but the plainest elements of knowledge shall ever be attainable by him. I will give to one man such a wealth of imagination, that he shall pile mountain upon mountain of imagery, till his language seems to reach to celestial majesty; I will give to another man a soul so dull, that he shall never be able to originate a poetic thought." Why this, O God? The answer comes back, "Shall I not do what I will with mine own?" "So, then, the children being not yet born, neither having done good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was written, the elder shall serve the younger." And so it is written concerning men, that one of them shall be greater than another; one shall bow his neck, and the other put his foot upon it, for the Lord hath a right to dispose of places and of gifts, of talents and wealth, just as seemeth good in his sight.

Now, most men quarrel with this. But mark, the thing that you complain of in God, is the very thing that you love in yourselves. Every man likes to feel that he has a right to do with his own as he pleases. We all like to be little sovereigns. You will give your money freely and liberally to the poor; but if any man should impertinently urge that he had a claim upon your charity, would you give unto him? Certainly not; and who shall impeach the greatness of your generosity in so doing? It is even as that parable, that we have in one of the Evangelists, where, after the men had toiled, some of them twelve hours, some of them six, and some of them but one, the Lord gave every man a penny. Oh! I would meekly bow my head, and say, "My Lord, hast thou given me one talent? then I bless thee for it, and I pray thee bestow upon me grace to use it rightly. Hast thou given to my brother ten talents? I thank thee for the greatness of thy kindness towards him; but I neither envy him, nor complain of thee." Oh! for a spirit that bows always before the sovereignty of God.

Again: God gives to one five, and to another two talents, because the Creator is a lover of variety. It was said that order is heaven's first law; surely variety is the second; for in all God's works, there is the most beautiful diversity. Look ye towards the heavens at night: all the stars shine not with the same brilliance, nor are they placed in straight lines, like the lamps of our streets. Then turn your eyes below: see in the vegetable world, how many great distinctions there are, ranging from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall, or the moss that is smaller still. See how from the huge mammoth tree, that seems as if beneath its branches it might shade an army, down to the tiny lichen, God hath made everything beautiful, but everything full of variety. Look on any one tree, if you please: see how

every leaf differs from its fellow—how even the little tiny buds that are at this hour bursting at the scent of the approaching perfume of spring, differ from each other—not two of them alike. Look again, upon the animated world: God hath not made every creature like unto another. How wide the range—from the colossal elephant, to the coney that burrows in the rock—from the whale that makes the deep hoary with its lashings, to the tiny minnow that skims the brook; God hath made all things different, and we see variety everywhere. I doubt not it is the same, even in heaven, for there there are "thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers"—different ranks of angels, perhaps, rising tier upon tier. "One star different from another star in glory." And why should not the same rule stand good in manhood? Doth God cast us all in the same mould? It seems not so; for he hath not made our faces alike; no two countenances can be said to be exactly the same, for if there be some likeness, yet is there a manifest diversity. Should minds, then, be alike? Should souls all be cast in the same fashion? Should God's creation dwindle down into a great manufactory, in which everything is melted in the same fire and poured into the same mould? No, for variety's sake, he will have one man a renowned David, and another David's unknown armour bearer; he will have one man a Jeremy, who shall prophesy, and another a Baruch, who shall only read the prophecy; one shall be rich as Dives, another poor as Lazarus; one shall speak with a voice loud as thunder, another shall be dumb; one shall be mighty in word and doctrine, another shall be feeble in speech and slow in words. God will have variety, and the day will come when, looking down upon the world we shall see the beauty of its history to be mightily indebted to the variety of the characters that entered into it.

But a little further. God hath a deeper reason than this. God gives to some men but few talents, because he has many small spheres, and he would have these filled. There is a great ocean, and it needs inhabitants. O Lord, thou hast made Leviathan to swim therein. There is a secret grotto, a hidden cavern, far away in the depths of the sea; its entrance is but small; if there were nought but a Leviathan, it must remain untenanted for ever: a little fish is made, and that small place becomes an ocean unto it. There are a thousand sprays and twigs upon the trees of the forest; were all eagles, how would the forests be made glad with song, and how could each twig bear its songster? But because God would have each twig have its own music, he has made the little songster to sit upon it. Each sphere must have the creature to occupy it adapted to the size of the sphere. God always acts economically. Does he intend a man to be the pastor of some small parish with four or five hundred inhabitants? Of what use is it giving to that man the abilities of an apostle? Does he intend a woman to be a humble teacher of her own children at home, a quiet trainer of her own family? Would it not even disturb her and injure her if God should make her a poetess, and give her gifts that might electrify a nation? The littleness of her talents will to a degree fit her for the littleness of her sphere. There is some youth who is quite capable of assisting in a Ragged School: perhaps if he had a higher genius he might disdain the work, and so the Ragged School would be without its excellent teacher. There are little spheres, and God will have little men to occupy them. There are posts of important duty, and men shall be found with nerve and muscle fitted for the labour. He has made a statue for every niche, and a picture for every portion of the gallery; none shall be left vacant; but since some niches are small, so shall be the statuettes that occupy them. To some he gives two talents, because two are enough, and five would be too many.

Once more: God gives to men two talents, because in them very often he displays the greatness of his grace in saving souls. You have heard of a minister who was deeply read in sacred lore; his wisdom was profound, and his speech graceful. Under his preaching many were converted. Have you never heard it not quite said, but almost hinted, that much of his success was traceable to his learning and to his graceful oratory? But, on the other hand, you have met with a man, rough in his dialect, uncouth in his manners, evidently without any great literary attainments; nevertheless, God has given that man the one talent of an earnest heart; he speaks like a son of thunder; with rough, stern language, he denounces sin and proclaims the gospel; under him hundreds are converted. The world sneers at him. "I can see no reason for all this," says the scholar; "it is all rubbish—cant; the man knows nothing." The critic takes up his pen, nibs it afresh, dips it in the bitterest ink he can find, and writes a most delightful history of the man, in which

he goes so far as to say, not that he sees horns on his head, but almost everything but that. He is everything that is bad, and nothing that is good. He utterly denounces him. He is foolish, he is vain, he is base, he is proud, he is illiterate, he is vulgar. There was no word in the English language that was bad enough for him, but one must be coined. And now what says the church? What says the man himself? "Even so, O Lord; now must the glory be unto thee for ever, inasmuch as thou hast chosen the base things of this world, and the things that are not, to bring to nought the things that are." So it seemeth that out of the little God sometimes winneth more glory than he doth out of the great; and I doubt not that he has made some of you with little power to do good, with little influence, and with a narrow sphere, that he may, in the last great day, manifest to angels how much he can do in a little space. You know, dear friends, there are two things that always will attract our attention. One is skill embodied in a stupendous mass. We see the huge ship, the Leviathan, and we wonder that man could have made it; at another time we see an elegant piece of workmanship that will stand upon less than a square inch, and we say, "Well, I can understand how men can make a great ship, but I cannot comprehend how an artist could have the patience and the skill to make so minute a thing as this." And ah! my friends, it seems to me that God is not a greater God to our apprehension, when we see the boundless fields of ether and the unnumbered orbs swimming therein, than when we see a humble cottager, and behold God's perfect word carried out in her soul, and God's highest glory wrought from her little talent. Surely if in the little, man can honour himself as well as in the great, the Infinite, and the Eternal, can most of all glorify himself when he stoopeth to the littlenesses of mankind.

II. Our second proposition was, that even A FEW TALENTS MUST BE ACCOUNTED FOR. We are very apt when we think of the day of judgment, to imagine that certain characters will undergo a more trying process than others. I know I have often involuntarily said, when reading the history of Napoleon, "Here is a man of tremendous ability, the world's master; a dozen centuries might be required to produce such another man; but here is a man who prostitutes all his ability to ambition, carries his armies like a destroying deluge across every country, widows wives, and renders children fatherless, not by hundreds but by thousands, if not by millions. What must be his solemn account when he stands before the throne of God? Shall not the witnesses rise up from the fields of Spain, of Russia, of Italy, of Egypt, of Palestine, and accuse the man who, to gratify his own bold ambition, led them to death?" But will you please to remember that though Napoleon must be a prisoner at the bar, each of us must stand there also? And though our position is not very high, and we have not stood upon the pinnacle of fame, yet we have stood quite high enough to be borne under the observation of the Most High, and we have had just ability enough and power enough to have done mischief in the world, and to be accountable for it. "Oh!" said one, "I thought that surely in the day of judgment he would pass me by; I have been no Tom Paine; I have not been a leader amongst low and vulgar infidels; I have been no murderer; I have not been a prince among sinners; I have not been a disturber of the public peace; what few sins I have committed have taken place quietly; nobody has heard of them; I don't think my bad example has gone far; perhaps my children have not been much blessed by my behaviour, but, nevertheless, mine has been a very small quantum of mischief, too small to have poisoned any one beside myself. I have been, on the whole, so tolerably moral, that though I cannot say I have served God, yet my defalcations from the path of duty have been slight indeed!" Ah! truly friends! you may think yourselves never so little, but your making yourselves insignificant will not excuse you. You have had but little entrusted to you! Then the less trouble for you to make use of your talents. The man who has many talents requires much hard labour to use them all. He might make the excuse that he found five talents too many to put out in the market at once; you have only one; anybody can lend out his one talent to interest—it will cost you but little trouble to apply that; and inasmuch as you live, and inasmuch as you die, without having improved the one talent, your guilt will be exceedingly increased by the very fact that your talent was but little, and, consequently, the trouble of using it would have been but little too. If you had but little, God required but little of you; why, then, did you not render that? If any man holds a house at a rental of a pound a year, let it be never so small a house for the money, if he brings not his rent there is not one half the excuse for him that there would be if his rent had been a hundred pounds, and he had

failed to bring it. You shall be the more inexcusable on account of the little that was required of you. Let me, then, address you, and remind you that you must be brought to account.

Remember, my hearer, that in the day of judgment thy account must be personal; God will not ask you what your church did—he will ask you what you did yourself. Now there is a Sunday school. If God should try all members of the church in a body, they would each of them say, O Lord, as a body we had an excellent Sunday school, and had many teachers, and so they would excuse themselves. But no; one by one, all professors must come before him. "What did you do for the Sabbath school? I gave you a gift for teaching children—what did you do?" "O Lord, there was a Sabbath school." That has nothing to do with it? What did *you* do? You are not to account now for the company with which you were united, but for yourself as an individual. "O," says one, "there were a number of poor ministers; I was at the Surrey Hall, and so much was done for them." No; what did you do? You must be held personally responsible for your own wealth, for your own ability. "Well," says one, "I am happy to say there is a great deal more preaching now than there used to be; the churches seem to be roused." Yes, sir, and you seem to take part of the credit to yourself. Do *you* preach more than you used to? You are a minister; do *you* make any greater efforts? Remember, it is not what your brethren are doing, but it is what *you* do that you will be called to account for at the bar of God; and each one of you will be asked this question, "What hast thou done with *thy* talent?" All your connection with churches will avail you nothing; it is your personal doings—your personal service towards God that is demanded of you as an evidence of saving grace. And if others are idle—if others pay not God his due—so much the more reason why you should have been more exceedingly diligent in doing so yourself.

Recollect, again, that your account will have to be particular. God will go into all the items of it. At the day of judgment you will not have to cast up a hurried account in the gross, but every item shall be read. Can you prove that? Yes. "For every idle word that man shall speak, he shall be brought unto account at the day of judgment." Now, it is in the items that men go astray. "Well," says one, "If I look at my life in the bulk, I am not very much ashamed, but it is those items, those little items—they are the troublesome part of the account, that one does not care to meddle with." Do you know that all yesterday was made up of littles? And the things of to-day are all little, and what you do to-morrow will all be little things. Just as the tiny shells make up the chalk hills, and the chalk hills together make up the range, so the trifling actions make up the whole account, and each of these must be pulled asunder separately. You had an hour to spare the other day—what did you do? You had a voice—how did you use it? You had a pen—you could use that—how did you employ it? Each particular shall be brought out, and there shall be demanded an account for each one. Oh, that you were wise, that ye did not slur this matter, but would take every note in the music of your behaviour, and seek to make each note in harmony with its fellow, lest, after all, the psalm of your life may prove to be a hideous discord. Oh, that ye who are without God would remember that your life is assuredly such, that the trial of the last great day must end in your condemnation.

Again, that account will be very exact, and there will be no getting off without those little things. "Oh! they were a few peccadilloes and very small matters indeed; I never took stock of them at all." But they will all be taken stock of then. When God comes to look into our hearts at last, he will not only look at the great but at the little; everything will be seen into, the pence sins as well as the pound iniquities—all must be brought against us, and an exact account given.

Again, remember, in the last place, upon this point, that the account will be very impartial at the day of judgment, when all will be tried without any reference to their station. The prince will be summoned to give an account of his talents, and side by side must stand his courtier and his slave. The mightiest emperor must stand at God's bar, as well as the meanest cottager. All must appear and be tried according to the deeds they have done in the body. As to our professions, they will avail us nothing. We may have been the proudest hypocrites that ever made the world sick with our pride, but we must be searched and examined, as much as if we had been the vilest sinners. We must take our own trial before God's eternal tribunal, and nothing can bias our judge, or make him give an opinion for or against us, apart from the evidence. Oh, how solemn this will make the

trial, especially if we have no blood of Christ to plead! The great Advocate will get his people an acquittal, through his imputed merits, even though their sin in itself would condemn them. But remember, that without him we shall never be able to stand the fiery ordeal of that last dread assize. "Well," said an old preacher, "when the law was given, Sinai was on a smoke, and it melted like wax; but when the punishment of the law is given, the whole earth will quake and quail. For who shall be able to endure the day of the Lord, the day of God's fierce anger?"

III. The last point is, IF BY DIVINE GRACE—(and it is only by divine grace that this can ever be accomplished)—OUR TWO TALENTS BE RIGHTLY USED, THE FACT THAT WE HAD NOT FIVE, WILL BE NO INJURY TO US.

You say, when such a man dies, who stood in the midst of the church, a triumphant warrior for the truth, the angels will crowd to heaven's gates to see him, for he has been a mighty hero, and done much for his Master. A Calvin or a Luther, with what plaudits shall they be received!—men with talents, who have been faithful to their trust. Yes, but know ye not, that there is many a humble village pastor whose flock scarcely numbers fifty, who toils for them as for his life, who spends hours in praying for their welfare, who uses all the little ability he has in his endeavour to win them to Christ; and do ye imagine that his entry into heaven shall be less triumphant than the entry of such a man as Luther? If so, ye know not how God dealeth with his people. He giveth them rewards, not according to the greatness of the goods with which they were entrusted, but according to their fidelity thereunto, and he that hath been faithful to the least, shall be as much rewarded, as he that hath been faithful in much. I want you briefly to turn to the chapter, to see this. You will note first, that the man with two talents came to his Lord with as great a confidence as the man that had five. "And he said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents; behold, I have gained two talents beside them." I will be bound to say, that while that poor man with the two talents was trading with them, he frequently looked upon his neighbour with the five talents, and said, "Oh, I wish I could do as much as he is doing! See now, he has five talents to put out, and how much interest he has coming every year; Oh, that I could do as much!" And as he went on he often prayed, "O my Lord, give me greater ability, and greater grace to serve thee, for I long to do more." And when he sat down to read his diary, he thought, "Ah, this diary does not tell much. There is no account of my journey through fifty counties; I cannot tell how I have travelled from land to land, as Paul did, to preach the truth. No; I have just had to keep in this parish, and been pretty well starved to death, toiling for this people, and if I have added some ten or a dozen to the church, that has been a very great deal to me. Why, I hear that Mr. So-and-so, was privileged to add two or three hundred in a year; Oh, that I could do that! Surely when I go to heaven, I shall creep in at the door somehow, while he by grace will be enabled to go boldly in, bringing his sheaves with him." Now stop, poor little faith, stop; thy Master will not deal thus with thee. When thou shalt come to die; thou wilt through his grace feel as much confidence in dying with thy two well-used talents, as thy brother with his ten, for thou wilt, when thou comest there, have thy Lord's sweet presence, and thou wilt say, "I am complete in Christ. Christ's righteousness covers me from head to foot, and now in looking back upon my past life, I can say, Blessed be his holy name. It is little that I could do, but I have done as much as I could for him. I know that he will pardon my defects, and forgive my miscarriages, and I shall never look back upon my humble village charge without much joy, that the Lord allowed me to labour there." And, Oh, methinks, that man will have even a richer commendation in his own conscience, than the man who has been more publicly applauded, for he can say to himself, after putting all his trust in Christ, "Well, I am sure I did not do this for fame, for I blushed unseen—I have lost my sweetness on the desert air. No one has ever read my deeds; what I did was between myself and my God, and I can render up my account to him and say, 'Lord, I did it for thee, and not to honour myself.'" Yes, friends, I might tell you now of many a score of earnest evangelists in this our land who are working harder than any one of us, and yet win far less honour. Yes, and I could bring you up many a score of city missionaries whose toil for Christ is beyond all measure of praise, who never get much reward here, nay, rather meet with slights and disrespect. You see the poor man start as soon as he goes from his place of worship to-day. He has got three hours this afternoon to go and spend among the sick, and then you will see him on Monday morning. He has to go from

house to house, often with the door slammed in his face, often exposed to mobs and drunken men, sometimes jeered and scoffed at, meeting with persons of all religious persuasions and of no persuasion. He toils on; he has his little evening meeting, and there he gets a little flock together and tries to pray with them, and he gets now and then a man or a woman converted; but he has no honour. He just takes him off to the minister, and he says, "Sir, here is a good man; I think he is impressed; will you baptize him and receive him into yonr church?" The minister gets all the credit of that, but as for the poor city missionary, there is little or nothing said of him. There is, perhaps, just his name, Mr. Brown, or Mr. Smith, mentioned sometimes in the report, but people do not think much of him, except, perhaps, as an object of charity they have to keep, whereas he is the man that gives them the charity, giving all the sap and blood and marrow of his life for some poor sixty pounds a year, hardly enough to keep his family above want. But he, when he dies, my friend, shall have no less the approval of his conscience than the man who was permitted to stand before the multitudes and raised the nation into excitement on account of religion. He shall come before the master clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and with unblushing face shall say, "I have received two talents; I have gained beside them two talents more."

Furthermore, and to conclude, you will notice there was no difference in his Master's commendation—none in the reward. In both cases, it was "Well done good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Here comes Whitfield, the man that stood before twenty thousand at a time to preach the gospel, who in England, Scotland, Ireland, and America, has testified the truth of God, and who could count his converts by thousands, even under one sermon! Here he comes, the man that endured persecution and scorn, and yet was not moved—the man of whom the world was not worthy, who lived for his fellow men, and died at last for their cause: stand by angels and admire, whilst the Master takes him by the hand and says, "Well done, well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" See how free grace honours the man whom it enabled to do valiantly. Hark! Who is this that comes there? a poor thin-looking creature, that on earth was a consumptive; there was a hectic flush now and then upon her cheek, and she lay three long years upon her bed of sickness. Was she a prince's daughter, for it seems heaven is making much stir about her? No, she was a poor girl that earned her living by her needle, and she worked herself to death!—Stitch, stitch, stitch, from morning to night! and here she comes. She went prematurely to her grave, but she is coming, like a shock of corn fully ripe, into heaven; and her master says, "Well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." She takes her place by the side of Whitfield. Ask what she ever did, and you find out that she used to live in some back garret down some dark alley in London; and there used to be another poor girl come to work with her, and that poor girl, when she first came to work with her, was a gay and volatile creature, and this consumptive child told her about Christ; and they used, when she was well enough, to creep out of an evening to go to chapel or to church together. It was hard at first to get the other one to go, but she used to press her lovingly; and when the girl went wild a little, she never gave her up. She used to say, "O Jane, I wish you loved the Saviour;" and when Jane was not there she used to pray for her, and when she was there she prayed with her; and now and then when she was stitching away, read a page out of the Bible to her, for poor Jane could not read. And with many tears she tried to tell her about the Saviour who loved her and gave himself for her. At last, after many a day of hard persuasion, and many an hour of sad disappointment, and many a night of sleepless tearful prayer, at last she lived to see the girl profess her love to Christ; and she left her and took sick, and there she lay till she was taken to the hospital, where she died. When she was in the hospital she used to have a few tracts, and she used to give them to those who came to see her; she would try, if she could, to get the women to come round, and she would give them a tract. When she first went into the hospital, if she could creep out of bed, she used to get by the side of one who was dying, and the nurse used to let her do it; till at last she got too ill, and then she used to ask a poor woman on the other side of the ward, who was getting better, and was going out, if she would come and read a chapter to her; not that she wanted her to read to

her on her own account, but for her sake, for she thought it might strike her heart while she was reading it. At last this poor girl died and fell asleep in Jesus; and the poor consumptive needle-woman had said to her, "Well done"—and what more could an archangel have said to her?—"she hath done what she could."

See, then, the Master's commendation, and the last reward will be equal to all men who have used their talents well. Ah! if there be degrees in glory, they will not be distributed according to our talents, but according to our faithfulness in using them. As to whether there are degrees or not, I know not; but this I know, he that doeth his Lord's will, shall have said to him, "Well done good and faithful servant."

And now, friends, this one word only. I have told you that there are many in our denomination who are preaching the gospel continually. I should bring some few of the letters, written by the poor ministers to us to read, but sometimes I think this a violation of delicacy, and I do not like to do it. But when I did that one year, the collection was almost twice as good; so I think I might almost commit a breach of etiquette in order to help them. However, I can solemnly assure you, that if there is poverty anywhere, it is to be found among the ministers in the Baptist churches, and I am sorry to say that one cause of it is the fault of the people themselves; they are so little in the habit of giving, that their ministers are starved. Now, if Christ will say, "Well done," hereafter, to many a humble preacher, do you think he intends the church to starve them while they are here on £30 or £40 a year. Now, brethren, if Christ will say, "Well done," at last, we may anticipate his verdict, and say, "Well done to-day." And can we better say, "well done" than by unmuzzling the ox that treadeth out the corn, and give these poor ministers something out of our own wealth, as God may help us, that their necessities may be supplied? There will be pretty well a score of persons who will be dependant during the next year upon what you give this year; perhaps you will remember that and assist them. One kind gentleman, who usually comes here, says "I could not come to-day, so I forward my pound to be put into the box by the minister." And I trust, it there are any not here to-day who will be here next Sabbath, that they will not forget this collection. It is always very dear to the heart of my church.

The Reward of the Righteous

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me"—Matthew xxv. 31—36.

It is exceedingly beneficial to our souls to mount above this present evil world to something nobler and better. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are apt to choke everything good within us, and we grow fretful, desponding, perhaps proud, carnal. It is well for us to cut down these thorns and briars, for heavenly seed sown among them is not likely to yield a harvest, and I do not know a better sickle with which to cut them down than thoughts of the kingdom to come. In the valleys in Switzerland many of the inhabitants are deformed and dwarfish, and the whole of them wear a sickly appearance, for the atmosphere is charged with miasma, and is close and stagnant; you traverse them as rapidly as you can, and are glad to escape from them. Up yonder on the mountain you will find a hardy race, who breathe the clear fresh air as it blows from the virgin snows of the Alpine summits. It would be well for their frames if the dwellers in the valley could frequently leave their abodes among the marshes and the fever mists, and get themselves up into the clear atmosphere above. It is to such an exploit of climbing that I invite you this morning. May the Spirit of God bear us as upon eagles' wings, that we may leave the mists of fear and the fevers of anxiety, and all the ills which gather in this valley of earth, and get ourselves up to the mountains of future joy and blessedness where it is to be our delight to dwell world without end! Oh may God disentangle us now for a little while, cut the cords that keep us here below, and permit us to mount! We sit, some of us, like chained eagles fastened to the rock, only that, unlike the eagle, we begin to love our chain, and would, perhaps, if it came really to the test, be loth to have it snapped. May God now grant us grace if we cannot at once escape from the chain of mortal life as to our bodies, yet to do so as to our spirits; and leaving the body like a servant at the foot of the hill,

may our soul, like Abraham, go to the top of the mountain, and there may we have communion with the Most High.

While expounding my text, I shall ask your attention this morning, first, *to the circumstances which surround the rewarding of the righteous;* secondly, *to their portion;* and thirdly, *to the persons themselves.*

I. There is MUCH OF TEACHING IN THE SURROUNDING CIRCUMSTANCES.

We read, "*When the King shall come in his glory.*" It appears, then, that we must not expect to receive our reward till by-and-by. Like the hireling we must fulfil our day, and then at evening we shall have our penny. Too many Christians look for a present reward for their labours, and if they meet with success, they begin doating upon it as though they had received their recompense. Like the disciples who returned saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us," they rejoice too exclusively in present prosperity; whereas the Master bade them not to look upon miraculous success as being their reward, since that might not always be the case. "Nevertheless," said he, "rejoice not in this, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Success in the ministry is not the Christian minister's true reward: it is an earnest, but the wages still wait. The approbation of your fellow-men you must not look upon as being the reward of excellence, for often you will meet with the reverse; you will find your best actions misconstrued, and your motives ill interpreted. If you are looking for your reward *here* I may warn you of the apostle's words, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable:" because other men get their reward; even the Pharisee gets his: "Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward;" but we have none here. To be despised and rejected of men is the Christian's lot. Among his fellow Christians he will not always stand in good repute. It is not unmitigated kindness nor unmingled love that we receive even from the saints. I tell you if you look for your reward to Christ's bride herself you will miss it; if you expect to receive your crown from the hand even of your brethren in the ministry who know your labours, and who ought to sympathize with your trials, you will be mistaken. "When the King shall come in his glory," then is your time of recompense; but not to-day, nor to-morrow, nor at any time in this world. Reckon nothing which you acquire, no honour which you gain, to be the reward of your service to your Master; that is reserved to the time "when the King shall come in his glory."

Observe with delight the august person by whose hand the reward is given. It is written, "When *the King* shall come." Brethren, we love the King's courtiers; we delight to be numbered with them ourselves. It is no mean thing to do service to him whose head—"Though once 'twas crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now." But it is a delightful thought that the service of rewarding us will not be left to the courtiers. The angels will be there, and the brethren of the King will be there; but heaven was not prepared by them, nor can it be given by them. Their hands shall not yield us a coronation; we shall join their songs, but their songs would be no reward for us; we shall bow with them and they with us, but it will not be possible for them to give us the recompense of the reward—that starry crown is all too weighty for an

angel's hand to bring, and the benediction all too sweet to be pronounced, even by seraphic lips. The King himself must say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What say you to this, my dear brother? You have felt a temptation to look to God's servants, to the approbation of the minister, to the kindly look of parents, to the word of commendation from your fellow-worker; all these you value, and I do not blame you; but these may fail you, and therefore never consider them as being *the* reward. You must wait till the time when the King cometh, and then it will neither be your brethren, your pastors, your parents, nor your helpers, but the King himself who shall say to you, "Come, ye blessed." How this sweetens heaven! It will be Christ's own gift. How this makes the benediction doubly blessed! It shall come from his lips, which drop like myrrh and flow with honey. Beloved, it is Christ who became a curse for us, who shall give the blessing to us. Roll ye this as a sweet morsel under your tongues.

The character in which our Lord Jesus shall appear is significant. Jesus will then be revealed as truly "*the King*." "When the *King* shall come." It was to him as King that the service was rendered, and it is from him as King that the reward must therefore come; and so upon the very threshold a question of self-examination arises: "The King will not reward the servants of another prince—am I therefore his servant? Is it my joy to wait at the threshold of his gates, and sit like Mordecai at the courts of Ahasuerus—at the entrance of his door? Say, soul, dost thou serve *the* King?" I mean not the kings and queens of earth; let them have loyal servants for their subjects; but saints are servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings—are ye so? If ye be not so, when the King cometh in his glory, there can be no reward for you. I long in my own heart to recognize Christ's kingly office more than ever I have done. It has been my delight to preach to you Christ dying on the cross, and "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross;" but I want for my own self to realize him on his throne, reigning in my heart, having a right to do as he wills with me, that I may get to the condition of Abraham, who, when God spoke, though it was to tell him to offer up his own Isaac, never asked a question, but simply said, "Here am I." Beloved, seek to know and feel the controlling power of the King, for else when he comes, since you have not known him as King, he cannot know you as servant; and it is only to the servant that the King can give the reward which is spoken of in the text,—"When the King shall come."

Now pass on. "When the King shall come in his *glory*." The fulness of that it is impossible to conceive.

> "Imagination's utmost stretch,
> In wonder dies away."

But this we know,—and it is the sweetest thing we can know,—that if we have been partakers with Jesus in his shame, we also shall be sharers with him in the lustre which shall surround him. Art thou, beloved, one with Christ Jesus? Art thou of his flesh and of his bones? Does a vital union knit thee to him? Then thou art to-day with him in his shame; thou hast taken up his cross, and gone with him without the camp bearing his reproach; thou shalt doubtless be with him when

the cross is exchanged for the crown. But judge thyself this morning; if thou art not with him in the regeneration, neither shalt thou be with him when he shall come in his glory. If you start back from the black side of communion, you shall not understand its bright, its happy period, when the King shall come in his glory and all his holy angels with him. What, are angels with him? And yet he took not up angels, he took up the seed of Abraham. Are the holy angels with him? Come, my soul, then thou canst not be far from him. If his friends and his neighbours are called together to see his glory, what thinkest thou if thou art married to him? Shall thou be distant? Though it be a day of judgment, yet thou canst not be far from that heart which having admitted angels into intimacy has admitted thee into union. Has he not said to thee, O my soul, "I have betrothed thee unto me in faithfulness, and in judgment, and in righteousness"? Have not his own lips said it, "I am married unto thee, and my delight is in thee"? Then if the angels, who are but the friends and the neighbours, shall be with him, it is abundantly certain that his own beloved Hephzibah, in whom is all his delight, shall be near to him and shall be a partaker of his splendour. It is when he comes in his glory, and when his communion with angels shall be distinctly recognised,—it is then that his unity with his Church shall become apparent. "*Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.*" Here is a repetition of the same reason why it should be your time and my time to receive the reward from Christ if we be found among his faithful servants. When *he* sits upon his throne it were not fit that his own beloved ones should be in the mire. When he was in the place of shame they were with him, and now he is on the throne of gold they must be with him too. There were no oneness,—union with Christ were amere matter of talk,—if it were not certain that when he is on the throne they shall be upon the throne too.

But I want you to notice one particular circumstance with regard to the time of the reward. It is *when he shall have divided the sheep from the goats*. My reward, if I be a child of God, cannot come to me while I am in union with the wicked. Even on earth you will have the most enjoyment of Christ when you are most separated from this world: rest assured, although the separated path does not seem an easy one, and it will certainly entail upon you persecution and the loss of many friends, yet it is the happiest walking in the world. You conforming Christians, who can enter into the world's mirth to a certain degree, you cannot, you never can know as you now are, the inward joys of those who live in lonely but lovely fellowship with Jesus. The nearer you get to the world the further you must be from Christ, and I believe the more thoroughly a bill of divorce is given by your spirit to every earthly object upon which your soul can set itself, the more close will be your communion with your Lord. "Forget also thine own country and thy Father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty, for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." It is significant that not until the King has separated the sheep from the goats does he say, "Come, ye blessed;" and though the righteous will have enjoyed a felicity as disembodied spirits, yet as risen from the grave in their bodies, their felicity is not fully accomplished till the great Shepherd shall have appeared to separate them once for all, by a great gulf which

cannot be passed, from all association with the nations that forget God. Now then, beloved, these circumstances all put together come to this, that the reward of following Christ is not to-day, is not among the sons of men, is not from men, is not even from the excellent of the earth, is not even bestowed by Jesus while we are here, but the glorious crown of life which the Lord's grace shall give to his people is reserved for the second advent, "when the King shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels with him." Wait with patience, wait with joyful expectation, for he shall come, and blessed be the day of his appearing.

II. We have now to turn to the second point—THE PORTION ITSELF. Every word is suggestive. I shall not attempt to exhaust, but merely to glance at all. The reward of the righteous is set forth by the loving benediction pronounced to them by the Master, but *their very position* gives some foreshadowing of it. He put the sheep on his right hand. Heaven is a position of the most elevated dignity authoritatively conferred, and of Divine complacency manifestly enjoyed. God's saints are always at his right hand according to the judgment of faith, but hereafter it shall be more clearly manifested. God is pleased to be close to his people, and to place them near to himself in a place of protection. Sometimes it seems as if they were at the left hand; they certainly have, some of them, less comfort than the worldlings. "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree; their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart could wish;" whereas his people are often made to drink waters of a full cup, and their meat and their drink are bittered with wormwood and gall. The world is upside down now; the gospel has begun to turn it the right way uppermost, but when the day of grace is over, and the day of glory comes, then shall it be righted indeed; then those that wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins shall be clothed in glittering apparel, being transfigured like the Saviour upon Tabor; then those of whom the world was not worthy shall come to a world that shall be worthy of them; then those who were hurried to the stake and to the flames shall triumph with chariots of fire and horses of fire, and swell the splendour of the Master's pompous appearing. Yes, beloved, you shall eternally be the object of Divine complacency, not insecret and unmanifested communion, but your state and glory shall be revealed before the sons of men. Your persecutors shall gnash their teeth when they see you occupying places of honour at his right hand, and themselves, though greater far than you on earth, condemned to take the lowest room. How shall Dives bite his fire-tormented tongue in vain as he sees Lazarus, the beggar on the dunghill, made to sit at the right hand of the King eternal and immortal! Heaven is a place of dignity. "There we shall be as the angels," saith one, but I wot we shall be even superior than they. Is it not written of him who in all things is our representative, "Thou hast put all things under his feet"! Even the very seraphs themselves so richly blessed, what are they but "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation?"

But now turning to the welcome uttered by the judge, The first word is "*Come.*" It is the gospel symbol. The law said "Go;" the gospel saith "Come." The Spirit saith it in invitation; the Bride saith it in intercession; "let him that heareth" say it by constantly, laboriously

endeavouring to spread abroad the good news. Since Jesus saith "Come," we learn that the very essence of heaven is communion. "Come!" Ye came near enough to say "Lord, we believe, help thou our unbelief!" On the cross ye looked to me and were lightened. Ye had fellowship with me in bearing my cross. Ye filled up that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ for his body's sake, which is the Church. Still come! Ever, come! For ever come! Come up from your graves, ye risen ones! Come up from among the ungodly, ye consecrated ones! Come up from where ye cast yourselves down in your humiliation before the great white throne! Come up to wear my crown, and sit with me upon my throne! Oh, that word has heaven lurking within it. It shall be to you your joy for ever to hear the Saviour say to you, "Come." I protest before you my soul has sometimes been so full of joy that I could hold no more when my beloved Lord has said "Come" to my soul; for he has taken me into his banqueting house, and his love-banner has waved over my head, and he has taken me away from the world, and its cares and its fears, and its trials and its joys, up to "the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon," where he manifested himself to me. When this "Come" shall come into your ear from the Master's lips there shall not be the flesh to drag you back, there shall be no sluggishness of spirit, no heaviness of heart; you shall come eternally then; you shall not mount to descend again, but mount on and on in one blessed Excelsior for ever and for ever. The first word indicates that heaven is a state of communion—"Come."

Then it is "*Come, ye blessed,*" which is a clear declaration that this is a state of happiness. They cannot be more blessed than they are. They have their hearts' desire, and though their hearts have been enlarged and their desires have been expanded by entering into the Infinite, and getting rid of the cramping influences of corruption and of time, yet even when their desire shall know no bound they shall have all the happiness that the utmost stretch of their souls can by any possibility conceive. This much, and this is all we know—they are supremely blessed. Their blessedness you perceive does not come from any secondary joy, but from the great primary Source of all good. "Come, ye blessed of my Father." They drink the unadulterated wine at the winepress itself, where it joyously leaps from the bursting clusters; they pluck celestial fruits from the unwithering boughs of the immortal tree; they shall sit at the well-head and drink the waters as they spring with unrivalled freshness from the depths of the heart of Deity; they shall not be basking in the beams of the sun, but they shall be like Uriel, the angel in the sun; they shall dwell in God, and so their souls shall be satisfied with favour, and full and more than full with his presence and benediction.

Notice, once again, that according to the words used it is a state where they shall recognise their right to be there; a state therefore of perfect freedom, and ease and fearlessness. It is—"*inherit the kingdom.*" A man does not fear to lose that which he wins by descent from his parent. If heaven had been the subject of earning, we might have feared that our merits had not really deserved it, and therefore suspect that one day a Writ of Error would be issued and that we should be ejected; but we do know whose sons we are; we know whose love

it is that makes glad our spirits, and when we "inherit" the kingdom we shall enter it not as strangers or as foreigners, but as sons coming to their birthright. Looking over all its streets of gold and surveying all its walls of pearl; we shall feel that we are at home in our own house, and have an actual right, not through merit but through grace, to everything that is there. It will be a state of heavenly bliss; the Christian shall feel that law and justice are on his side, and that those stern attribntes have brought him there as well as mercy and loving-kindness. But the word "inherit" here imports full possession and enjoyment. They have inherited in a certain sense before, but now as an heir when he has arrived at full maturity, begins to spend his own money, and to farm his own acres, so do they enter into their heritage. We are not full grown as yet, and therefore are not admitted to full possession. But wait awhile; those grey hairs betoken, my brethren, that you are getting ripe. These, these, these my still youthful locks show me alas that I may have to tarry for a little longer, and yet I know not, the Lord may soon permit me to sleep with my fathers; but later or earlier, be it as he wills, we shall one day come into possession of the goodly land. Now if it is sweet to be an heir while you are in nonage, what is it to be an heir when arrived at perfect manhood? Was it not delightful to sing that hymn just now, and to behold the land of pure delight, whose everlasting spring and never-withering flowers are just across the narrow stream of death. Oh ye sweet fields! Ye saints immortal who lie down therein! When shall we be with you and be satisfied? If the mere thinking of heaven ravishes the soul, what must it be to be there, to plunge deep into the stream of blessedness, to dive and find no bottom, to swim and find no shore? To sip of the wine of heaven as we sometimes do makes our hearts so glad that we know not how to express our joy; but what will it be to drink deep and drink again, and sit for ever at the table and know that the feast will never be over and the cups will never be empty, and that there will be no worse wine to be brought out at the last, but if possible better still and better still in infinite progression?

The word "*kingdom,*" which stands next, indicates the richness of the heritage of saints. It is no petty estate, no alms rooms, no happy corner in obscurity. I heard a good man say he should be content to win a corner behind the door. I shall not be. The Lord says we shall inherit a *kingdom.* We would not be satisfied to inherit less, because less than that would not suit our character. "He hath made us kings and priests unto God," and we must reign for ever and ever, or be as wretched as deposed monarchs. A king without a kingdom were an unhappy man. If I were a poor servant, an alms room would be a boon, for it would consort with my condition and degree; but if I am made by grace a king, I must have a kingdom, or I shall not have attained to a position equal to my nature. He who makes us kings will give us a kingdom to fit the nature which he hath bestowed upon us. Beloved, do strive after, more and more, that which the Spirit of God will give you, a kingly heart; do not be among those who are satisfied and contented with the miserable nature of ordinary humanity. A child's glass bead is all the world is to a truly royal spirit; these glittering diadems are only nursery toys to God's kings; the true

jewels are up there; the true treasury wealth looks down upon the stars. Do not stint your soul; be not straitened! Get a kingly heart—ask the King of kings to give it to you, and beg of him a royal spirit. Act royally on earth towards your Lord, and for his sake towards all men. Go about the world not as mean men in spirit and act, but as kings and princes of a race superior to the dirt-scrapers who are on their knees, crawling in the mud after yellow earth. Then, when your soul is royal, remember with joy that your future inheritance shall be all that your kingly soul pants after in its most royal moments. It will be a state of unutterable richness and wealth of soul.

According to the word "*prepared*," we may conceive it to be a condition of surpassing excellence. It is a *kingdom prepared*, and it has been so long a time prepared, and he who prepares it is so wondrously rich in resources, that we cannot possibly conceive how excellent it must be. If I might so speak, God's common gifts, which he throws away as though they were but nothing, are priceless; but what will be these gifts upon which the infinite mind of God has been set for ages of ages in order that they may reach the highest degree of excellence? Long before Christmas chimes were ringing, mother was so glad to think her boy was coming home, after the first quarter he had been out at school, and straightway she began preparing and planning all sorts of joys for him. Well might the holidays be happy when mother had been contriving to make them so. Now in an infinitely nobler manner the great God has prepared a kingdom for his people; he has thought, "that will please them, and that will bless them, and this other will make them superlatively happy." He prepared the kingdom to perfection; and then, as if that were not enough, the glorious man Christ Jesus went up from earth to heaven; and you know what he said when he departed,—"I go to prepare a place for you." We know that the infinite God can prepare a place fitting for a finite creature, but the words smile so sweetly at us as we read that Jesus himself, who is a man, and therefore knows our hearts' desires, has had a finger in it; *he* has prepared it too. It is a kingdom prepared for you, upon which the thoughts of God have been set to make it excellent "from before the foundation of the world."

But we must not pause: it is a "kingdom prepared for *you*." Mark that! I must confess I do not like certain expressions which I hear sometimes, which imply that heaven is prepared for some who will never reach it; prepared for those who will be driven as accursed ones into the place of torment. I know there is a sacred expression which says, "let no man take thy crown;" but that refers to the crown of ministerial success, rather than of eternal glory. An expression which grated on my ear the other evening from the lips of a certain good man, ran something in this fashion: "There is a heaven prepared for all of you, but if you are not faithful you will not win it. There is a crown in heaven laid up for you, but if you are not faithful it will be without a wearer." I do not believe it, I cannot believe it. That the crown of eternal life which is laid up for the blessed of the Father will ever be given to anybody else or left without possessor, I do not believe. I dare not conceive of crowns in heaven and nobody to wear them. Think you that in heaven, when the whole number of saints is complete, you

will find a number of unused crowns? "Ah! what are these for? Where are the heads for these?" "They are in hell!" Then, brother, I have no particular desire to be in heaven, for if all the family of Christ are not there, my soul will be wretched and forlorn because of their sad loss, because I am in union with them all. If one soul that believed in Jesus does not get there I shall lose respect for the promise and respect for the Master too; he must keep his word to every soul that resteth on him. If your God has gone the length of actually preparing a place for his people and has made provision for them and been disappointed, he is no God to me, for I could not adore a disappointed God. I do not believe in such a God. Such a being would not be God at all. The notion of disappointment in his eternal preparations is not consistent with Deity. Talk thus of Jupiter and Venus if you please, but the Infinite Jehovah is, as far as human speech can dishonour him, dishonoured by being mentioned in such a connection. He has prepared a place for *you*. Here is personal election. He has made a distinct ordinance for every one of his people that where he is there shall they be.

"Prepared from before the foundation of the world." Here is eternal election appearing before men were created, preparing a crown before heads were made to wear it. And so God had before the starry skies began to gleam carried out the decree of election in a measure which when Christ shall come shall be perfected to the praise of the glory of his grace, "who worketh all things after the counsel of his will." Our portion then is one prepared from all eternity for us acccording to the election of God's grace, one suitable to the loftiest character to which we can ever attain, which will consist in nearness to Christ, communion with God, and standing for ever in a place of dignity and happiness.

III. And now I have very little time to speak, as I hoped to have spoken this morning about THE PERSONS WHO SHALL COME THERE.

They are recognisable by a secret and by a public character. Their *name* is—"blessed of the Father,"—the Father chose them, gave his Son for them, justified them through Christ, preserved them in Christ Jesus, adopted them into the family, and now accepted them into his own house. Their *nature* you have described in the word "inherit." None can inherit but sons; they have been born again, and have received the nature of God; having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust, they have become partakers of the Divine nature: they are sons. Their *appointment* is mentioned; "inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from before the foundation of the world." Their name is "blessed," their nature is that of a child, their appointment is that of God's decree.

Their doings, their outward doings, these we want to speak a minute upon. They appear to have been distinguished among men for deeds of charity, and these were not in any way associated with ceremonies or outward observances. It is not said that they preached—they did so, some of them; it is not said that they prayed—they must have done so, or they would not have been spiritually alive. The actions which are selected as their type, are actions of charity to the indigent and forlorn. Why these? I think, because *the general audience assembled around the*

throne would know how to appreciate this evidence of their newborn nature. The King might think more of their prayers than of their alms, but the multitude would not. He speaks so as to gain the verdict of all assembled. Even their enemies could not object to his calling those blessed who had performed these actions; for if there be an action which wins for men the universal consent to their goodness, it is an action by which men would be served. Against this there is no law. I have never heard of a state in which there was a law against clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. Humanity at once, when its conscience is so seared that it cannot see its own sinfulness, yet detects the virtuousness of feeding the poor. Doubtless this is one reason why these actions were selected. And again, they may have been chosen as evidences of grace, because, *as actions, they are a wonderful means of separating between the hypocrite and the true Christian.* Dr. Gill has an idea, and perhaps he is right, that this is not a picture of the general judgment, but of the judgment of the professing Church, and if so, it is all the more reasonable to conclude that these works of mercy are selected as the appropriate discerner between the hypocrite and the sincere. I fear that there are some of you high professors who could not stand the test. "Good praying people" they call you, but what do you give to the Lord? Your religion has not touched your pockets. This does not apply to some of you, for there are many here of whom I would venture to speak before the bar of God, that I know their substance to be consecrated to the Lord and his poor, and I have sometimes thought that beyond their means they have given both to the poor and to God's cause. But there are others of a very different disposition. Now here I shall give you a little plain English talk which none can fail to understand. You may talk about your religion till you have worn your tongue out, and you may get others to believe you; and you may remain in the Church twenty years, and nobody ever detect you in anything like an inconsistency; but, if it be in your power, and you do nothing to relieve the necessities of the poor members of Christ's body, you will be damned as surely as if you were drunkards or whoremongers. If you have no care for God's Church this text applies to you, and will as surely sink you to the lowest hell as if you had been common blasphemers. That is very plain English, but it is the plain meaning of my text, and it is at my peril that I flinch from telling you of it. "I was an hungred, and ye gave me"—what? good advice; yes, but no meat. "I was thirsty, and ye gave me"—what? a tract, and no drink. "I was naked, and ye gave me"—what? your good wishes, but no clothes. I was a stranger and—ye pitied me, but—ye took me not in. I was sick, you said you could recommend me a doctor, but you did not visit me. I was in prison, I, God's servant, a persecuted one, put in prison for Christ's sake, and you said I should be more cautious; but you did not stand by my side and take a share of the blame, and bear with me reproach for the truth's sake. You see this is a very terrible winnowing fan to some of you niggardly ones whose main object is to get all you can and hold it fast, but it is a fan which frequently must be used. Whoever deceives you or spares you, by the grace of God, I will not, but will labour to be more bold than ever in denouncing sin. "Well," says one, "what are those to do who are so poor that they have nothing to give away?" My dear

brother, do you notice how beautifully the text takes care of you. It hints that there are some who cannot give bread to the hungry, and clothes to the naked, but what about them? Why you see they are the persons spoken of as "my brethren," who receive the boon of kindness, so that this passage comforts the poor and by no means condemns them. Certain of us honestly give to the poor all we can spare, and then of course everybody comes to such; and when we say, "Really, I cannot give any more," somebody snarls and says, "Call yourself a Christian?" "Yes, I do, I should not call myself a Christian if I gave away other people's money; I should not call myself a Christian if I gave away what I have not got; I should call myself a thief, pretending to be charitable when I could not pay my debts." I have a very great pity indeed for those people who get into the Bankruptcy Court, I do not mean the debtors, I have seldom much sympathy with them, I have a good deal for the creditors who lose by having trusted dishonest people. If any man should say, "I will live beyond my means in order to get a good character," my dear brother, you begiu wrong, that action is in itself wrong. What you have to give must be that which is your own. "But I shall have to pinch myself," says one, "if I do it." Well, pinch yourself! I do not think there is half the pleasure in doing good till you get to the pinching point. This remark of course applies only to those of us of moderate means, who can soon distribute our alms and get down to the pinch point. When you begin to feel, "Now, I must go without that; now I must curtail these in order to do more good." Oh! you cannot tell; it is then when you really can feel, "Now I have not given God merely the cheese parings and candle ends that I could not use, but I have really cut out for my Master a good piece of the loaf; I have not given him the old crusts that were getting mouldy, but I have given him a piece of my own daily bread, and I am glad to do it, if I can show my love to Jesus Christ by denying myself." If you are doing this, if you are thus out of love to Jesus feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, I believe that these are put down as tests, because they are such blessed detectives between the hypocrites and the really godly people. When you read "for" here, you must not understand it to be that their reward is *because* of this, but that they are proved to be God's servants by this; and so, while they do not merit it because of these actions, yet these actions show that they were saved by grace, which is evidenced by the fact that Jesus Christ wrought such and such works in them. If Christ does not work such things in you, you have no part in him; if you have not produced such works as these you have not believed in Jesus. Now somebody says, "Then I intend to give to the poor in future in order that I may have this reward." Ah, but you are very much mistaken if you do that. The Duke of Burgundy was waited upon by a poor man, a very loyal subject, who brought him a very large root which he had grown. He was a very poor man indeed, and every root he grew in his garden was of consequence to him; but merely as a loyal offering he brought to his prince the largest his little garden produced. The prince was so pleased with the man's evident loyalty and affection that he gave him a very large sum. The steward thought, "Well, I see this pays; this man has got fifty pounds for his large root,

I think *I* shall make the duke a present." So he bought a horse and he reckoned that he should have in return ten times as much for it as it was worth, and he presented it with that view: the duke, like a wise man, quietly accepted the horse, and gave the greedy steward nothing. That was all. So you say, "Well, here is a Christian man, and he gets rewarded. He has been giving to the poor, helping the Lord's Church, and see he is saved; the thing pays, I shall make a little investment." Yes, but you see the steward did not give the horse out of any idea of loyalty, and kindness, and love to the duke, but out of very great love to himself, and therefore had no return; and if you perform deeds of charity out of the idea of getting to heaven by them, why it is yourself that you are feeding, it is yourself that you are clothing; all your virtue is not virtue, it is rank selfishness, it smells strong of selfhood, and Christ will never accept it; you will never hear him say, "Thank you" for it. You served yourself, and no reward is due. You must first come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and look to him to save you; you will for ever abjure all idea of doing anything to save yourself, and being saved, you will be able to give to the poor and so on without selfishness mixing with your motive, and you will get a reward of grace for the love token which you have given. It is necessary to believe in Christ in order to be capable of true virtue of the highest order. It is necessary to trust Jesus, and to be yourself fully saved, before there is any value in your feeding the hungry or clothing the naked. God give you grace to go to my Master wounded yonder, and to rest in the precious atonement which he has made for human sin; and when you have done that, being loved at such a rate, show that you love in return; being purchased so dearly, live for him that bought you; and among the actions by which you prove it, let these gleam and glisten like God-given jewels,—the visiting of the sick, the comforting of the needy, the relieving of the distressed, and the helping of the weak. God accept these offerings as they come from gracious souls, and to him be praise evermore. Amen.

The Final Separation

"And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats"—Matthew xxv. 32.

JESUS Christ, the man of Nazareth, who is also the Son of God, was crucified, dead, and buried, and the third day he rose again from the dead. After he had showed himself to his disciples for forty days—sometimes to one alone, at other times to two or three together, and on one occasion to above five hundred brethren at once—he ascended into heaven. From the Mount Olivet, from the midst of his disciples, he rose into mid air, and by-and-by a cloud received him out of their sight. That same Jesus who is gone into heaven shall so come in like manner as he was seen to go up into heaven; that is to say, in person, in his own risen body. The same Christ who rose into the skies will in the latter day surely descend again. The time of his coming is not revealed to us,—"Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of God;" but the time is certainly growing nearer every day, and we cannot tell when the hour shall be. We are told that he will come quickly. It seems a long time since that was said, even eighteen hundred years, but we remember that things which are slow with us may be very quick with the Lord; for one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons; they remain hidden in the purpose of God.

For excellent reasons these times and seasons are unrevealed, that we may be always on the watch-tower, not knowing at what hour the Lord Jesus may be revealed. To the ungodly world he will come as a thief in the night, and take them at unawares; but we, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake us as a thief. Being children of the day, we are taught to be wakeful, and standing in the clear light, with our loins girt, we ought to be always looking for our Master's appearing. Always are we to be watching, never sleeping.

Our text tells us that as one result of his coming there will be a general judgment. I am not going to-night to try and arrange the other events which will happen at the Lord's coming. It is probably true that at his coming there will be first of all a resurrection and rewarding of his saints, a dividing of the ten cities, and the five cities, according to the faithfulness of those who were entrusted with talents; and at the close of that period will come that last tremendous day of which prophets and apostles have spoken.

> "The day that many thought should never come;
> That all the wicked wished should never come;
> That all the righteous had expected long;
> Day greatly feared, and yet too little feared
> By him who feared it most."

A day of fear and wrath, a day of destruction of the ungodly, a testing day to all mankind, a day which shall burn as an oven. We may tremblingly say of it, "Who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap."

At that day when Christ shall come he shall judge all nations. There will be gathered before him, not only the Jews, to whom the law was given, but the Gentiles also; not merely those nations who for many an age have heard the gospel, but those to whom it shall then have been but lately published, for the kingdom of God must be published throughout all nations as a testimony against them. Everywhere Christ will have been preached, and then from all regions men shall be summoned to stand before him. Remember, not merely all the living nations, but all the nationalities that have passed away. There shall rise from the dead the hosts that perished before the flood and those also who were drowned amid its awful surges. There, too, shall appear the myriads that followed at the call of Nimrod, the swarms of the sons of Japheth, who divided the isles of the Gentiles, and the hordes that marched to battle at the command of the kings of Assyria and Babylon. The dead of Egypt shall rise from their beds of spices, or from the earth with which their dust has mingled. The tens of thousands shall be there over whom Xerxes wept when he remembered how soon they would all pass away. The Greek and the Persian, these shall rise, and the Roman too, and all the hordes of Huns and Goths that swarmed like bees from the northern hives. They all passed into the unknown land, but they are not lost, they shall each answer to the muster-roll in the great day of the Lord. The earth, which is now becoming more and more a graveyard, shall yield up her dead, and the sea itself, transformed into a solid pavement, shall bear upon its bosom the lonely ones who lie asleep to-day in her gloomy caverns. All of woman born shall come forth from the prolific womb of the sepulchre —myriads, myriads countless as the drops of the morning, or as the sands of the sea shore. Multitudes, multitudes shall be gathered together in the valley of decision. Their bones shall come together, and breath shall enter their bodies anew, and they shall live once more. Long as they have slept in the tomb, they shall all rise with one impulse and start up with one thought—*to appear before their Judge.*

The great white throne shall be set on high, all pure and lustrous, bright and clear like a sapphire stone, as one vast looking-glass in which every man shall see himself and his sins reflected; and on that throne shall sit the Son of Man. That same Jesus who was nailed to the tree, and rose to heaven shall sit upon the judgment seat, appointed to determine the cases of all mankind of every age. What an assemblage! No imagination can compass it. Far as the eye can carry—ay, far as the eagle's pinion can soar—the earth shall be covered with men, like a field with grass in the springtide; and there will they all stand with the Judge upon the great white throne as the common centre of observation, for every eye shall see him, and they also that crucified him, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. It will be a motley throng, as you may well imagine, but the Shepherd, the great Shepherd, the Judge himself, shall divide them. That division will be the one work of the judgment day. He will divide them as readily and unerringly as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. My business to-night shall be to draw the attention of each one to that division, that each of you may enquire what will be the result of it upon himself. I have thought it over on my own account, and desire to think of it still: I would bid my mind fly into the future, and see for a moment "the pomp of that tremendous day when Christ with clouds shall come;" I would anticipate the verdict of that hour, and bethink me of the dread alternative of heaven or hell. I pray we may all think of it, and especially you who are unprepared for it, that you may at once fly to him whose blood and righteousness alone can make you hold up your head in that tremendous hour.

Three things we shall speak about: the first is the *division;* the second is *the divider;* and the third is *the rule of the division.*

I. The first, then, is THE DIVISION. "Before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats."

That is to say, first, *they shall be divided into two parts*—his sheep and the goats. There shall be two positions: he shall put his sheep on the right hand, but the goats on the left. Is there no place for a third party? No, for the simple reason that there will then be no third class; and there will then be none for this other reason, that there never was a third class. I know there are some even here to-night who dare not say they believe in Jesus, but they would not like to be put down among the ungodly: yet I pray you remember that there are but two books, and in one or other of those two your name must stand recorded by the hand of God, for there is no third book. There is the Lamb's Book of Life, and if your name is there happy are you. If it is not there your sins still stand recorded in the books which contain the condemning evidence which will seal the death-warrants of unbelievers. Listen to me. There are in this world nowhere any other sort of people beside those who are dead in sin and those who are alive unto God. There is no state between. A man either lives or is dead; you cannot find a neutral condition. A man may be in a swoon, or he may be asleep, but he is alive; no state is there that is not within the boundary of either life or death. Is not this

clear enough? There is no state between being converted and unconverted—between being quickened and being dead in sin. There is no condition between being pardoned and having our sins upon us. There is no state between dwelling in darkness and being brought into marvellous light. One or the other must always be our condition; and this is the great folly of mankind in all times—that they will dream of a middle state and try to loiter in it. It was for this cause that the old prophet, standing on Carmel's brow, said, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, follow him." And it is for this reason that we have constantly to call the attention of mankind to the great declaration of the gospel,—"He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned."

God has given to the preacher two hands, that he may set the people on each side, and deal out the truth to two characters and no more. Be not deceived about it, you are either in the way to heaven or on the road to hell. There is no purgatory or middle condition in the next world. Purgatory is an invention of the Pope for the filling of his cellar and his larder; and no more profitable speculation has ever been set agoing than the saying of masses and the robbing of dupes, under the pretence of altering that state which is fixed for ever. Purgatory Pickpurse was the name the first reformers gave it. You will go to heaven or to hell, and you will remain in one place or the other; for you have either a character that is fit for heaven or a character that is fit for hell, and there is no character which can be supposed, if we understand the Scriptures aright, which would be fit for a middle place, neither is there any middle place prepared for it. "He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." The human flock will be divided into two companies.

Observe, next, that *they will be divided readily.* It is not everybody that could divide sheep from goats. I suppose according to your ordinary judgment of goats you would very readily tell them from sheep; but one who has travelled in the East, and even in Italy, knows that it takes a somewhat tutored eye to know a certain kind of goat from a certain kind of sheep. They are extremely like each other: the wool of some sheep in a warm climate becomes so like hair, and the hair of a kind of goat is so much like wool, that a traveller scarcely knows which is which; but a shepherd who has lived among them knows the difference well. So in this world, it is easy enough to tell the sinner from the saint in some cases: you need no great wit to discern the characters of the grossly dishonest, the drunken, the debauched, the Sabbath-breaking, the profane. You know that they have no part amongst the people of God, for they bear upon their forefront the ensigns of the children of the evil one: the immoral are easily separated from the pure in heart. But inside the church there are a number of persons who have so much about them that looks good, and yet so much that is terribly inconsistent, that we are quite unable to discover which is their true nature. Thank God we are not called upon to judge them, nor even allowed to do so. The most experienced

pastor must scarcely attempt to do so: certainly, if he feels so much trouble about the matter that he takes it to his Lord, and asks for directions as to how to deal with these tares, he will be told to let them grow on till harvest time, lest in rooting up the tares he should root up also the wheat with them. I talked to-day to a certain good man who labours hard among the poor in the East-end. He said, "We have a great number who profess to be converted; but," he said, "I do not think that much more than one in five actually stay and turn out to be really so. But," said he, "we have no trouble about them in the church—not such trouble as you would be likely to have with your people, because," said he, "amongst the class of people who go to the Tabernacle there is a feeling that it is right to go to the House of God at least once on the Sabbath, if not twice; and if persons join the church there they will from habit continue to attend. But," said he, "the moment a man of the poorest class ceases to be a Christian in heart, he ceases at the same time to attend the public services, because there is no fashion to keep him up to it; and so he follows his own tastes, stops at home and loafs about, and in all probability gets drunk, or falls into some other of the common vices of his class, and he is sifted off at once." In such cases the classes are easily separated. But among a more respectable class of people, who do not drink and who observe the Sabbath-day, you will have a number of people who remain in the church, though they have no secret piety, no real love to Christ, no private prayer; and hence there is all the more danger. Now, dear friends, what *we* cannot do, and must not try to do, Jesus Christ will do easily enough. The shepherd when he comes will soon separate his sheep from the goats. His eye of fire will read each heart; the hypocrites in the church will tremble in a moment, instinctively reading the meaning of that glance, as Christ will by that eye say to them, "What do ye here amongst my people?"

Remember, that as the division will be made readily *it will be made infallibly;* that is to say, there will not be found amongst the goats one poor trembling sheep left to be driven off with the unclean herd. When Christ says "Depart, ye cursed," he will not say that to one sincere but feeble soul. Ah no, you may condemn yourself, but if you really have a living faith the Lord will not condemn you. You may often be afraid that he will bid you depart, but he will not. No lamb of his flock shall be among the goats. The whole company of his redeemed shall be safely gathered into their eternal mansions.

> "Lord, those shall bear that day, so dread, so splendid,
> Whose sins are by thy merits cover'd o'er,
> Who when thy hand of mercy was extended,
> Believ'd, obey'd, and own'd thy gracious power;
> These, mighty God, shall see without dismay
> The earth and heaven before them pass away."

The sword cuts the other way too: and therefore be ye sure of this, that there will be no goat suffered to enter the pastures of the blessed among the sheep; no unconverted graceless person will follow the Great Shepherd to those living fountains above which afford eternal draughts of

bliss to the purchased flock. Though the sinner may have led a sort of outwardly consistent life for forty or fifty years, though he may have preached the gospel and done many wonderful works, yet Christ will say to him, "I never knew you." He will not be able to keep on his sheep's clothing then, or bleat any longer in sheep fashion: Christ will know him under whatever disguise he may wear, he will find him out, and drive him to his own place, so that not a single one of the accursed shall enter into the city with the blessed. It will be an infallible judgment; there is, therefore, good reason that we be prepared for it. There is no bribing or deceiving the judge, and no avoiding his tribunal. Oh, be ye ready to face that eye which will read you through and through!

That division, when it shall take place, let me further beg you to remember, *will be very keen and sharp*. Think it over, think it over; for some of you may have to smart through it. Two men shall be in the field, one shall be taken and the other left: these were two labourers who worked together, they had guided the same plough and driven the same oxen; but the one shall be upon the right hand and the other on the left. Two carpenters at the same bench had handled the same adze and the same plane, but one shall be taken and the other left: two had served in one shop at the same counter with the same goods, and one shall be taken and the other left; they were familiar acquaintances and old shopmates, but one shall rejoice to hear the welcome "Come," and the other shall tremble as he receives the dread sentence, "Depart." Alas, the division will come closer home still. Two women shall be in one house: the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; that is, engaged about the household duties, grinding the morning's breakfast corn—one shall be taken and the other left. So you may be two servants in the same house, cook and housemaid, one saved and the other lost: two sisters living together under the same roof, one brought into glory and the other cast into shame: two of you may be dwellers under the same roof, eating bread at the same table, drinking from the same cup, and yet one of you shall feast at the eternal banquets and the other shall cry for a drop of water to cool his burning tongue. You would not like to be separated, but separated you must be. Alas, there will be a separation still more painful yet! Two shall be in one bed, the one shall be taken and the other left—the husband torn away from the wife, and the wife sundered from her husband. Oh, there will be partings, there will be partings; and consequently there will be weeping, there will be weeping at the judgment-seat of Christ; not for the godly, for in them the glory of their Lord will swallow up all other thought, but for the Christless, the prayerless, the graceless. Oh, the wailing of the children, and the wailing of the women, and the wailing of the husbands, and the wailing of the fathers, when their children are saved, or their parents are saved, or their husbands and wives are saved, and they themselves are cast out for ever!

"O there will be mourning
Before the judgment seat,
When this world is burning
Beneath Jehovah's feet.

"Friends and kindred then shall part,
Shall part to meet no more;
Wrath consume the rebel's heart,
While saints on high adore!"

The separation will be agony indeed to the lost. I could scarce have the heart to bid a man "good bye" if I knew that I should never see him again. The worst wish I could entertain concerning the worst enemy I ever had—though I do not know that I have one in the world—would not go so far as to say I wished I might never see him again, for since I hope I shall be where Jesus is I should like to see him, be he who he may, and see him there amongst the blessed. But it must not be; it must not be if sinners will not repent of sin; if they will persist in rejecting Jesus Christ. Except ye believe in Jesus the parting will be keen and cutting, dividing between joints and marrow, tearing asunder marriage ties, and bonds of filial or parental affection; slaying all vain hopes for ever. O souls impenitent, I could weep for you! If you are linked in blood relationship with the saints it will not help you if you die unregenerate! Though you were bone of each other's bone and flesh of each other's flesh, yet must you be separated unless you are one with Christ. I entreat you unregenerate ones to lay this to heart at once, and trifle no longer!

That division, dear friends, remember, *will be very wide* as well as very keen; for the division will be such as will be represented in its distance by heaven and by hell: and what a distance is that! The distance between God and devil! Between happiness and misery! Between glory and everlasting contempt! Between infinite joy and boundless sorrow! Between songs and weeping! Between triumphs and wailing, feasting and gnashing of teeth! If the only division would be such as might arise from difference in degrees of glory (if such there be), one might still pine to have the companionship of our dear ones: but the difference is between heaven and hell, and Christ says of it that there is "a great gulf fixed" so that they that would pass from us to you cannot; neither can they come to us that would come from thence. The distance will be wide as eternity, the separating gulf will be deep as the abyss, and impassable as hell.

And, remember, *the separation will be final*. There is no flinging a bridge across that vast abyss. Damned spirits may look down into that dread gulf, into the unutterable blackness of its darkness, but they will never see a hope of crossing to the land of the blessed. The key is lost; they can never come out of the dungeon of despair. "For ever, for ever, for ever," is written upon the chain which binds the lost spirit. No hope of restoration was ever indulged by a man in hell, and it is idle to dream about it now. Of all figments of the brain it has the least support in Scripture. The lost sinner is for ever separated from Jesus and from the disciples of Jesus, however near akin in the flesh those disciples may have been to him. Unalterable is the separation and eternal.

Beloved, these are such weighty things that while I dwell upon them I feel far more inclined to sit down and weep than to stand up and speak to you. The theme causes me to feel the weakness of mere words, and in a measure makes me lose the power of expression; for

what if any of you should be lost for ever? It was a touching thing to me yesterday when I saw a sister in Christ who has been my hearer for many years, and she told me that she was decided for Christ by my saying, when I went away last time, that perhaps I might never address you again, and might find a grave in a foreign land. I felt that it might be so at the time I uttered the words, though I am glad that they have not been fulfilled. She thought, "Well, he has been preaching to me these many years, and if I die unconverted I shall never see him again:" and then it flashed across her mind, "How much worse to feel that I shall never see the King in his beauty; I shall never see the Saviour;" and she was thus led by the Holy Ghost to give her heart to Jesus. Perhaps the Lord may use the thought of this separation to move some of you to say, "I will come to Jesus, and I will rest in him." O Lord, my God, grant it may be so, for Jesus' sake.

II. We have spoken about *the division*, we will now have a few words about THE DIVIDER. "*He* shall separate them one from another."

Christ Jesus will be the divider of the race of men into two parts; and this I am glad to know, because, first of all, this will be *the occasion of lasting, yea, of eternal joy to all the saints.* No child of God will ever have a doubt in heaven; but it is needful that they begin their bliss with a very strong assurance of divine love, or else, methinks, they might. Unless God had ordained the method at which the text hints, I could well imagine myself in heaven saying to myself, after I had been there a little while, "Oh, can it be, can it be that I am here? I do remember the sin of such a day, and the shortcomings of such an hour, and my murmurings, and my unbelief, and all my departures from my God; and am I here, after all?" I could imagine, if there had not been the means used to put an end to such a possibility, my saying, "Surely I am to taste this only for a moment that I may be driven to my due deserts after all, that my hell may be made the more terrible because I have seen what heaven is, and that my hunger may grow the more intolerable because I have eaten of the bread of angels." If such a fear were possible, behold the answer to it. "He, the judge, the judge, the judge himself has said, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father.'" That judge cannot be mistaken, for he is Jesus the infallible Son of God. God himself has blessed his chosen, and Jesus tells them so in the plainest terms—"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Since Jesus has decreed his everlasting happiness, the child of God cannot doubt throughout eternity. That voice will sound for ever in his ears, sweeter than music of flute or harp or dulcimer. "Come, ye blessed of my Father." Why, it will be the very basis of the bliss of heaven to think, "Jesus bade me come. Who shall ask me the question, How camest thou in hither? Did not *he* admit me? Who shall question my right to be here? Did not *he* say, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father'?" Do you not see that it is a choice and comforting fact that we shall not divide ourselves at the last, nor shall an angel do it who might err, but the divider will be Jesus himself, the Son of God; and therefore the glory which he metes out to us will be most surely ours, and we may enjoy it without fear.

But then, note on the other hand, that *this will increase the terror of the lost,* that Christ will divide them.

Christ, full of infinite love, would he destroy a sinner unless it must be! He that would have saved Jerusalem, and wept because it must be destroyed! The guilty city was resolved to perish, but as her Lord pronounced the sentence he wept. When I hear of a judge putting on the black cap to condemn a man, I like to read in the papers, "The judge's voice faltered, and he was evidently unable to suppress his emotion as he uttered the sentence of death." What right-minded man could be otherwise than moved when compelled to deliver his fellow-creature to the gallows? But no judge on earth has such compassion for his fellow man as Jesus has for sinners; and when it comes to this that *he* says, "I must do it, I must condemn you," then, sinner, it must be so indeed. When incarnate love says, "Depart, ye cursed," you must be cursed with an emphasis. You must be infamous beings indeed when he whose lips drop blessings as lilies drop sweet-smelling myrrh,—when *he* calls you so! There must be something very horrible about you that *he* should bid you "depart;" and, indeed, there is an abominable thing in you, for unbelief in God is the most horrible thing, even in hell. Not to believe that God is love is worthy of the utmost condemnation. You will have to say if you are lost, "I was condemned by the most loving judge that ever sat upon a judgment seat. The Christ that died lifted his pierced hand at the very moment when he said, 'Depart, ye cursed!'"

Yet there is something more, though this might be enough. If you should be lost, as God forbid you should, it will infinitely add to your terror to know that you were condemned by one who is infinitely just. You will feel that the Christ who condemned you was the holiest of men, in whom was no sin, and that, besides, he is pure and perfect God; so that you will not be able to cavil at the sentence. Neither will there be any question about a new trial; your own conscience will make you feel that the decision is final, for it is just; and you will be too well assured of its reality and certainty, for he who will pronounce that sentence is the God of truth. He said, "I am the way and the truth:" you would not have him for a way, but you will find him to be "the truth": and when he pronounces you cursed, cursed you will be beyond all question.

Once more. If he that condemns you will be the Christ of God you will know that he has power to carry out the sentence, for all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and if he says, "Depart into everlasting fire" into that fire you must go. If he declares that the fire shall never be quenched, depend upon it, it will burn on for ever; and if he decrees that the worm shall never die, that worm will live and gnaw to all eternity, for he who gives forth the sentence is able to make it good. Remember how he said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall never pass away." Firmer than the rocks shall stand the irrevocable decree—"these shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal." My soul trembles while I thus proclaim Jesus as the judge whose awful voice divides the sinners from the saints.

III. Lend me your ears but for a minute or two longer, while I notice, in the third place, THE RULE OF THE DIVISION. Did you notice where the division is made? It is very wonderful to me—very wonderful indeed! *The great division between the sons of men is Christ.* Here are the sheep: there are the goats. What parts them? Christ! He is the centre. There is no great barrier set up, as it were, on that last tremendous day, but he himself is the division. He shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left. Now, that which parts us to-night into two portions is our relationship to Jesus Christ. On which side of Christ are you to-night? I want you to question yourselves about that. If you are on his right hand you are among his people. If you are not with him you are against him, and so are on his left hand. That which parts the saint and the sinner is Christ; and the moment a sinner comes to Christ he passes over to the other side, and is numbered with the saints. This is the real point of separation. Christ stands between the believers and the unbelievers, and marks the boundary of each class. When Aaron stood between the living and the dead swinging the censer full of incense, what separated the dead from the living? Realise the scene before you answer the question. There they lie! There they lie, I say, stricken with pestilence! The unseen avenger has slain them in heaps. But here are the living, rejoicing and safe. What separates them? The priest standing there with the censer. Even thus our great High Priest stands at this moment between the living and the dead, while the incense of his merits ascends before God, and makes the most real dividing wall between dead sinners and those who are alive unto God by Jesus Christ. Christ is the divider, Christ is himself the division.

But what is the rule by which he separates the people? *The rule of the division is, first, actions.* Actions! Did you notice that? He says nothing about words. He dwells upon deeds of mercy, "I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was naked and ye clothed me." These are all actions. Now, perhaps you would have liked the judge to have said: "You were wont to sing hymns out of 'Our Own Hymn Book.' You were wont to talk very sweetly about me, and call me Master and Lord. You were accustomed to sit at the communion table." Not a word is said about these things. No, nor is anything said about ceremonial actions. He does not say, "You used to bow before the pyx; you reverently stood up at one part of the service, and knelt at another; you walked round the church singing the processional hymn." Nothing is said about these performances, only common actions are noticed, "I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink"; these are all commonplace matters. Actions will be the great rule of judgment at last. I am not preaching now contrary to the gospel, but only repeating in other words what our Lord himself has said. "We shall give an account for the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil," is the statement, not of the law, but of the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Those that have *done* evil shall go away into eternal punishment.

Are we, then, saved by our works? By no manner of means. Yet our works are the evidences of our being saved, and grace will bring

out these evidences in our lives if we possess them. A magistrate judges by the actions which are proved upon evidence; it is true he may and will have respect to the motive which urged the action, but first of all the actions themselves must be before him in evidence; and so here the King mentions the actions that were done.

Let us notice that the actions which were the rule of judgment *were all of them actions about Christ.* I want you carefully to note this: the Lord says, "*I* was hungry and ye gave *me* meat; *I* was thirsty and ye gave *me* drink; *I* was sick and ye visited *me*." This summary is made up of actions about Christ. I will, therefore, very earnestly put this question—What actions have you ever done in reference to Jesus? "I am a church member," says one. I will not hear about that just now, because the judge will not say anything about it. I am glad you are an avowed disciple, if you are honestly so; but do your actions prove that you are really so? That is the question. Have you ever *done* anything for Christ? Have you ever given anything to Christ? Could Christ say to you, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink"? Now, I know some professors of whom I fear that Jesus Christ could not speak thus, for he cannot speak that which is not true. Their pockets are hermetically sealed, like tins of Australian meat; even the smell of their money never reaches Christ's poor. Give meat to a hungry man? Not they. Let him go to the parish. Give clothes to a naked man? Not they. What do we pay rates for? The idea of giving anything to another, or doing anything for another, without getting paid for it or praised for it, seems to them to be out of all character. Now, selfishness is as much opposed to the spirit of the gospel as the cold of the northern region is to the warmth of the sun. If the sun of Christ's love has shone into your heart you will love others, and you will show your love to others by desiring to do them good in all sorts of ways, and you will do it for Christ's sake—*for Christ's sake:* so that when he comes he will be able to say, "*I* was an hungered and ye gave *me* meat; *I* was thirsty and ye gave *me* drink; *I* was sick and ye visited *me;* *I* was in prison under reproach and ye came unto *me*." What have your actions been with regard to Christ? I pray you, brethren and sisters, who are one with me in the profession of allegiance to Christ, judge yourselves by your actions with regard to him, as I also will judge myself.

Now, notice that Christ, as it were, inferentially, tells us that *the actions which will be mentioned at the judgment day, as the proof of our being the blessed of the Lord, spring from the grace of God,* for he says, "Ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world." They fed the hungry, but sovereign grace had first fed *them.* They clothed the naked, but infinite love first clothed *them.* They went to the prison, but free grace had first set them free from a worse prison. They visited the sick, but the good Physician in his infinite mercy first came and visited them. They evidently had no idea that there was anything meritorious in what they did; they had never dreamed of being rewarded for it. When they stand before the judgment-seat, the bare idea of there being any excellence in what they have done will be new to the saints, for they

have formed a very lowly estimate of their own performances, and what they have done seems to them too faulty to be commended. The saints fed the hungry and clothed the naked because it gave them much pleasure to do so. They did it because they could not help doing it, their new nature impelled them to it. They did it because it was their delight to do good, and was as much their element as water for a fish or the air for a bird. They did good for Christ's sake, because it was the sweetest thing in the world to do anything for Jesus. Why is it that a wife is so kind to her husband? Because it is her duty, you say. All very well, but the real reason is because she loves him so intensely. Why is a mother so careful over her babe? Is there any rule or act of parliament commanding mothers to be fond of their little ones? No, there is no act of parliament; there is an act of God, in the bosom somewhere, passed *nem. con.* in the chamber of the heart, and the mother cannot but be kind. Now, when the Lord puts a new nature into us, and makes us one with Jesus Christ, we cannot help loving his people, and seeking the good of our fellow-men; and the Lord Jesus Christ will own this at the last day as an evidence that there was love in the heart, because love was shown by the hand. May God grant that when the Judge of all shall come we may be found renewed in heart and full of love through the power of his Holy Spirit.

"Oh," saith one, "I wish I had that renewed heart which would produce such actions." Jesus can give it you. You will always live for self in some sense or other until you are saved: even the most philanthropic who have loved their fellow-creatures best, without religion, have generally sought for their esteem, and the verse is true concerning the praise of our fellow-creatures—

> "The proud, to gain it, toils on toils endure;
> The modest shun it but to make it sure."

But when you receive a new heart you will not live for the approbation of your fellow-men. Then your alms will be done in secret, and you will not let your left hand know what your right hand doeth. Then, when you do your kindnesses, it will not be that others may publish abroad the announcement that you have visited the sick and clothed the naked, but your alms' deeds will be done behind the door and in the corner, where none shall know of them but your God and the grateful recipients of your bounty. You will quietly put into the treasury the two mites that make a farthing, and think yourself unobserved, but One who sits over against the treasury, who knows your heart, will take good note of it. Your Lord will accept what you do because you do it out of love to him; and at the last, while you blush to hear it, he will tell it to the angels and to the listening hosts of earth and heaven, and swing wide the gates of immortal bliss, and let you in, according to the promise of his grace.

God bless you, beloved, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

What the Farm Labourers Can Do and What They Cannot Do

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come"—Mark iv. 26—29.

LAST Lord's-day morning our subject was the labourers upon God's farm and their great Master; and then we tried to show how far human agency was necessary in the work of the gospel. We also saw how thoroughly all holy results depend upon God, for neither he that soweth nor he that watereth is anything, but God who giveth the increase. We have much the same subject this morning, only it goes a little deeper, and yet more fully shows how far the labourer can go, and how far he cannot go; where man may enter with holy industry, and where no human work can possibly intrude. Our subject on this occasion will mainly be the measure and limit of human instrumentality in the kingdom of grace. If we shall be taught of the Spirit of God we shall find this Scripture to be full of instruction upon the matter.

It is remarkable that the parable before us is peculiar to Mark. No other evangelist has recorded it, but we do not think any the less of it on that account. If it had been told to us four times we should have been glad to hear the repetition, and would have given it a fourfold attention; as it is told us but once, we will give the more earnest heed to a voice which speaketh once for all. We are glad that the Holy Spirit led Mark to reserve this pearl out of the many excellent things which our Lord said which have been lost. John tells us that if a record of all the works which Jesus did could have been preserved they would have made a library so large that scarce the world itself could have contained all the books. Many of the things that Jesus said floated about, no doubt, for a time, and were gradually forgotten, and we have to be thankful to the Spirit of God for perpetuating this choice similitude by the hand of his servant Mark. Preserved in the amber of inspiration, this choice instruction is of priceless value.

Here is a lesson for sowers,—for the labourers upon the farm of God.

It is a parable for all who are concerned in the kingdom of God. It will be of little value to those who are in the kingdom of darkness, for they are not bidden to sow the good seed: "Unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" But all who are loyal subjects to King Jesus, all who are commissioned to scatter seed for the Royal Husbandman, will be glad to know how the kingdom advances, glad to know how the harvest is preparing for him whom they serve. Listen, then, ye that sow beside all waters; ye that with holy diligence seek to fill the garners of your God,—listen, and may the Spirit of God speak into your ears as you are able to bear it.

I. We shall, first, learn from our text WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT WE CANNOT DO. Let this stand as our first head.

"So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground": this the gracious worker can do. "And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how": this is what he cannot do, it belongs to a higher power. Man can neither make the seed spring nor grow up, he is out of the field in that respect, and may go home "to sleep, and rise night and day." Seed once sown is beyond human jurisdiction, and is under divine care. Yet ere long the worker comes in again:—"When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle." We can reap in due season, and it is both our duty and our privilege so to do. You see, then, that there is a place for the worker at the beginning, and though there is no room for him in the middle passage, yet another opportunity is given him further on when that which he sowed has actually yielded fruit.

Notice, then, that *we can sow*. Any man who has received the knowledge of the grace of God in his heart can teach others. I include under the term "man" all who know the Lord, be they male or female. We cannot all teach alike, for all have not the same gifts; to one is given one talent, and to another ten. Neither have we all the same opportunities, for one lives in obscurity and another has far-reaching influence. Yet there is not within the family of God an infant hand which may not drop its own tiny seed into the ground. There is not a man among us who needs to stand idle in the market-place, for work suitable to his strength is waiting for him. There is not a saved woman who is left without a holy task; let her do it and win the approving word. "She hath done what she could." Something of sacred service is within the reach of everyone's capacity, whether it be the mother in the family, the nurse-girl with the infant, the boy in the school, the workman at the bench, or the nurse at the bedside. Those with the smallest range of opportunities can, nevertheless, do something for Christ and his cause. The precious seed of the word of God is small as a grain of mustard-seed, and may be carried by the feeblest hand where it shall multiply a hundred-fold.

We need never quarrel with God because we cannot do everything if he only permits us to do this one thing; for sowing the good seed is a work which will need all our wit, our strength, our love, our care. Holy seed sowing may well be adopted as our highest pursuit, and be no inferior object for the noblest life that can be led. You will need heavenly teaching that you may carefully select the wheat, and keep it free from the darnel of error. We must even winnow out of it our own thoughts

and opinions, for these may not be according to the mind of God. Men are not saved by our word, but by God's word. We are bound to see that we know the gospel, and teach the whole of it. To different men we must, with discretion, bring forward that part of the word of God which will best bear upon their consciences; for much may depend upon the word being *in season*, and not a chance sentence thrown out at random. We shall have enough to do if we look well to the seed-basket, lest, peradventure, we should sow tares as well as wheat, or should cast good seed wantonly, where it can only feed evil birds.

Having selected the seed, we shall have plenty of work if we go forth and sow it broadcast everywhere, for every day brings its opportunity, and every company furnishes its occasion. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand." "Sow beside all waters." Imitate the sower in the parable, who was not so penny-wise that he would only cast the seed where, according to his judgment, all was good soil, but who, feeling that he had other work for his judgment besides the selecting of the soil, threw the seed right and left as he went on his way, and denied not a handful even to thorny and rocky soils. You, dear fellow-workers, will have enough to do if at all times, and in all places, as prudence and zeal suggest, you spread abroad the living word of the living Lord.

Still, wise sowers discover favourable opportunities for sowing, and gladly seize upon them. There are times when it would clearly be a waste to sow; for the soil could not receive it, it is not in a fit condition. After a shower, or before a shower, or at some such time as he that hath studied husbandry knows, then is the time to be up and doing. So while we are to work for God always, yet there are seasons when it were casting pearls before swine to talk of holy things; and there are other times when if we were slothful it would be a shameful waste of propitious seasons. Sluggards in the time for ploughing and sowing are sluggards indeed, for they not only waste the day, but throw away the year. If you watch for souls, and use hours of happy vantage, and moments of sacred softening, you will not complain of the scanty space allowed for agency. Even should you never be called to water, or to reap, your office is wide enough if you fulfil the work of the sower.

For little though it seem to teach the simple truth of the gospel, yet it is essential. How shall men hear without a teacher? The farm never brings forth a harvest without sowing. Weeds will grow without our help, but not so wheat and barley. The human heart is so depraved that it will naturally bring forth evil in abundance, and Satan is quite sure not to let it lie without a sowing of evil seed; but if ever a man's soul is to yield fruit unto God the seed of truth must be cast into it from without. Servants of God, the seed of the word is not like thistle-down, which is borne by every wind, nor like certain seeds wafted by their own parachutes here, there, and everywhere, but the wheat of the kingdom needs a human hand to sow it, and without such agency it will not enter into men's hearts, neither can it bring forth fruit to the glory of God. The preaching of the gospel is the necessity of every age; God grant that our country may never be deprived of it. Even if the Lord should send us a famine of bread and a famine of water, may he never send us a famine of the word of God. Faith cometh by hearing, and

how can there be hearing if there is no teaching? Scatter ye, scatter ye then, the seed of the kingdom, for this is essential to the harvest. The spreading of the gospel is not a thing that ye may do or may not do, according to your pleasure, but it is a duty urgently needful, to be neglected at your peril. Ye can sow the seed, and the seed must be sown.

This seed should be sown often, for the times are such that one sowing may not suffice. Sow again and again, for many are the foes of the wheat, and if ye repeat not your sowing ye may never see a harvest. The seed must be sown everywhere, too, for there are no choice corners of the world that you can afford to let alone, in the hope that they will be self-productive. Ye may not leave the rich and intelligent under the notion that surely the gospel will be found among them, for it is not so: the pride of life leads them away from God. You may not leave the poor and illiterate, and say, "Surely they will of themselves feel their need of Christ." Not so: they will sink from degradation to degradation unless you uplift them with the gospel. No tribe of man, no peculiar constitution of the human mind, may be neglected by us, but everywhere we must preach the word, in season and out of season. I have heard that Captain Cook, the celebrated circumnavigator, was in one respect an admirable example to us. Wherever he landed, in whatever part of the earth it might be, he took with him a little packet of divers English seeds, and he was often observed to scatter them in suitable places. He would leave the boat and wander up from the shore. He said nothing to anybody, but quietly scattered English seeds wherever he went, so that he belted the world with the flowers and herbs of his native land. Imitate him wherever you go; sow spiritual seed in every place that your foot shall tread upon. Some of you will before long be at the seaside, or amidst the mountains of Switzerland, or in some other regions of the earth, in the search of variety and beauty; carry the heavenly seeds with you, and be not satisfied unless in every place you let fall a grain or two that may bring forth fruit unto your God. This is what you can do; mind that you do it.

Let us now think of what you cannot do. *You cannot, after the seed has left your hand, cause it to put forth life.* I am sure you cannot make it grow, for you do not know how it grows. The text saith, "And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how." That which is beyond the range of our knowledge is certainly beyond the reach of our power. Can you make a seed germinate? You may place it under circumstances of damp and heat which will cause it to swell and break forth with a shoot, but the germination itself is beyond you. How is it done? We know not. After the germ has been put forth, can you make it further grow, and develop its life into leaf and stem? No; that, too, is out of your power. And when the green, grassy blade has been succeeded by the ear, can you ripen it? It will be ripened; but can *you* do it? You know you cannot; you can have no finger in the actual process, though you may promote the conditions under which it is produced. Life is a mystery; growth is a mystery; ripening is a mystery: and these three mysteries are as fountains sealed against all intrusion. How comes it that there is within the ripe seed the preparations for another sowing and another growth?

What is this vital principle, this secret reproducing energy? Knowest thou anything about this? The philosopher may say that he can explain life and growth, and straightway he will, according to the ordinary process of philosophy, bamboozle you with terms which are less understandable than the ordinary talk of infants; and then he will say, "There is the whole matter! It is as clear as possible." He cloaks his ignorance with learned jargon, and then calls it wisdom. To this day it still remaineth true of the growth of the commonest seeds,—"He knoweth not how." The scientific man may talk about chemical combinations and physical permutations, and he may proceed to quote analogies from this and that; but still the growth of the seed remains a secret, it springs, "He knoweth not how." Certainly this is true of the rise and progress of the word of God in the heart. It enters the soul, and roots itself ye know not how. Naturally men hate the word, but it enters and it changes the heart, so that they come to love it, but we know not how. Their whole nature is renewed, so that instead of producing sin it yields repentance, faith, and love, but we know not how. How it is that the Spirit of God deals with the mind of man, how he creates the new heart and the right spirit, how we are begotten again unto a lively hope, how we are born of the Spirit, we cannot tell. The Holy Ghost enters into us; we hear not his voice, we see not his light, we feel not his touch; yet he worketh an effectual work upon us, which we are not long in perceiving. We know that the work of the Spirit is a new creation, a resurrection, a quickening from the dead; but all these words are only covers to our utter ignorance of the mode of his working, with which it is not in our power to meddle. We do not know how he performs his miracles of love, and, not knowing how he works, we may be quite sure that we cannot take the work out of his hands. We cannot create, we cannot quicken, we cannot transform, we cannot regenerate, we cannot save.

This work of God having proceeded in the growth of the seed, what next? *We can reap the ripe ears.* After a season God the Holy Spirit uses his servants again. As soon as the living seed has produced first of all the blade of thought, and afterwards the green ear of conviction, and then faith, which is as full corn in the ear, then the Christian worker comes in for further service, for *he can reap.* "When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle." This is not the reaping of the last great day, for that does not come within the scope of the parable, which evidently relates to a human sower and reaper. The kind of reaping which the Saviour here intends is that which he referred to when he said to his disciples, "Lift up now your eyes, for behold the fields are white already to the harvest." After he had been sowing the seed in the hearts of the Samaritans, and it had sprung up, so that they began to evince faith in him, the Lord Jesus cried, "The fields are white unto the harvest." The apostle saith, "One soweth, and another reapeth." Our Lord said to the disciples, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour." Is there not a promise, "in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not"?

Christian workers begin their harvest work by watching carefully to see when men evince signs of faith in Christ. They are eager to see the blade, and delighted to mark the ripening ear. They often hope that

men are believers, but they long to be sure of it: and when they judge that at last the fruit of faith is put forth, they begin to encourage, to congratulate, and to comfort. They know that the young believer needs to be housed in the barn of Christian fellowship, that he may be saved from a thousand perils. No wise farmer leaves the fruit of the field long exposed to the hail which might beat it out, or the mildew which might destroy it, or the birds which might despoil it. Evidently no believing man should be left outside of the garner of holy fellowship, he should be carried into the midst of the church with all the joy which attends the home-bringing of sheaves. The worker for Christ watches carefully, and when he discerns that his time is come he begins at once to fetch in the converts that they may be cared for by the brotherhood, separated from the world, screened from temptation, and laid up for the Lord. He is diligent to do it at once, because the text saith, "immediately he putteth in the sickle." He does not wait for months in cold suspicion; he is not afraid that he shall encourage too soon when faith is really present. He comes with the word of promise and the smile of brotherly love at once, and he says to the new believer, "Have you confessed your faith? Is not the time come for an open confession? Hath not Jesus bidden the believer to be baptized? If you love him, keep his commandments." He does not rest till he has introduced the convert to the communion of the faithful. For our work, beloved, is but half done when men are made disciples and baptized. We have then to encourage, to instruct, to strengthen, to console, and succour in all times of difficulty and danger. What saith the Saviour? "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you."

The reaper is the man who gathers in the converts, and he fulfils an honourable and useful office. If I preach the gospel to-day, and some shall be converted, I shall be the sower; but if going home to the respective towns in which you live, you who have dropped in here as strangers, shall be received into the churches by your own pastors, they will be reaping what I have sown. I envy not my brother minister his success in gathering in the converts, but I rejoice with him. The sower and the reaper may well rejoice together, for our work is one, and we labour for one Lord.

Observe, then, the sphere of agency. We can introduce the truth to men, but that truth the Lord himself must bless; the living and growing of the word within the soul is the operation of God alone. When the mystic work of growth is done we are able to introduce the saved ones into the church. To bring them into the fellowship of the faithful is our work, and we must not fail to do it. For Christ to be formed in men the hope of glory is not of our working, that remains with God; but when Jesus Christ is formed in them, to discern the image of the Saviour and to say, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?" this is our duty and delight. To create the divine life is God's, to cherish it is ours. To cause the hidden life to grow in secret is the work of the Lord; to see the uprising and perfecting of that life, and to rejoice in it is the work of the faithful.

even as it is written, "when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

This, then, is our first lesson; we see what we can do and what we cannot do.

II. Our second head is like unto the first, and consists of WHAT WE CAN KNOW AND WHAT WE CANNOT KNOW.

First, *what we can know.* We can know when we have sown the good seed of the word that it will grow; for God has promised that it shall do so. Not every grain in every place; for some will go to the bird, and some to the worm, and some to be scorched by the sun; but as a general rule God's word shall not return unto him void, it shall prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it. This we can know. And we can know that the seed when once it takes root will continue to grow; that it is not a dream or a picture that will disappear, but a thing of force and energy, which will advance from a grassy blade to corn in the ear, and under God's blessing will develop to actual salvation, and be as the "full corn in the ear." God helping and blessing it, our work of teaching will not only lead men to thought and conviction, but to conversion and eternal life.

We also can know, because we are told so, that the reason for this is mainly because there is life in the word. In the word of God itself there is life, for it is written—"The word of God is quick and powerful," —that is, "living and powerful." It is "the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever." It is the nature of living seeds to grow, and the reason why the word of God grows in men's hearts is because it is the living word of the living God, and where the word of a king is there is power. We know this, because the Scriptures teach us so. Is it not written, "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth"?

Moreover, the earth, which is here the type of the man, "bringeth forth fruit of herself." We must mind what we are at in expounding this, for human hearts do not produce faith of themselves; they are as hard rock on which the seed perishes. But it means this,—that as the earth under the blessing of the dew and the rain is, by God's secret working upon it, made to take up and embrace the seed, so the heart of man is made ready to receive and enfold the gospel of Jesus Christ within itself. There is a something congruous in the earth to the seed which is sown in it, so that the seed is adopted and nourished by the soil. Just so is it by the heart of man when God makes it honest and good ground. Man's awakened heart wants exactly what the word of God supplies. Moved by a divine influence the soul embraces the truth, and is embraced by it, and so the truth lives in the heart, and is quickened by it. The man's love accepts the love of God; man's faith wrought in him by the Spirit of God believes the truth of God; man's hope wrought in him by the Spirit of God lays hold upon the things revealed, and so the heavenly seed grows in the soil of the soul. The life comes not from you who preach the word, but it is placed within the word which you preach by the Holy Spirit. The life is not in your hand, but in the man himself who is led to take hold upon the truth by the Spirit of God. Salvation comes not from the personal authority of the preacher, but through the personal conviction, personal faith, and personal love of the hearer. You, the sower, are thus taught by the parable

that spiritual life and growth are of God, and come by the seed and the soil far more than by you. So far as the truth is concerned, its intrinsic power is the same whoever preaches it. It is not because such and such a divine, whom God has blessed, tells out the gospel, that therefore it lives in men's hearts. Oh, no; it is because of the truth itself, and because of the hearts themselves which receive the truth by the secret working of God's blessed Spirit. So much as this we may know, and is it not enough for all practical purposes?

Still, there is *a something which we cannot know:* a secret into which we cannot pry. I repeat what I have said before, you cannot look into men's inward parts and see exactly how the truth takes hold upon the heart, or the heart takes hold upon the truth. Many have watched their own feelings till they have become blind with despondency, and others have watched the feelings of the young till they have done them rather harm than good by their rigorous supervision. In God's work there is more room for faith than for sight. The heavenly seed grows secretly. You must bury it out of sight, or there will be no harvest. Even if you keep the seed above ground, and it does sprout, you cannot discover *how* it grows; even though you microscopically watched its swelling and bursting, you could not see the inward vital force which moves the seed. Behind the veil which conceals the secret working of God in the mysteries of natural life and growth you cannot pry; and as for the divine life in man, it must for ever be hidden from all mortal eyes. The result of it you shall be able to see, and something about the way of its development you shall be able to know; but the actual *modus operandi*, the secret and innermost mystery of the new birth, it shall not be given to you to perceive. Thou knowest not the way of the Spirit. His work is wrought in secret, and thou canst not tell whence he cometh or whither he goeth. "Explain the new birth," says somebody. "My answer is, "Experience the new birth, and you shall know what it is." There are secrets into which we cannot enter, for their light is too bright for mortal eyes to endure. O man thou canst not become omniscient, for thou art a creature, and not the Creator. For thee there must ever be a region not only unknown but unknowable. So far shall thy knowledge go, but no further; and thou mayest thank God it is so, for thus he leaves room for faith, and gives cause for prayer. Cry mightily unto the Great Worker to do what thou canst not attempt to perform, that so, when thou seest the salvation of men, thou mayest give him all the glory evermore.

III. Thirdly, our text tells us WHAT WE MAY EXPECT IF WE WORK FOR GOD, AND WHAT WE MAY NOT EXPECT. According to this parable we may expect to see fruit. The husbandman casts his seed into the ground, and the seed springs and grows, and he may expect a harvest. I wish I could say a word to stir up the expectations of Christian workers; for I fear that many work without faith. If you have a garden or a field, and you sow seed in it, you would be very greatly surprised and grieved if it did not come up at all; but many Christian people seem quite content to work on, and they never reckon upon result so much as to look for it expectantly. This is a pitiful kind of working—pulling up empty buckets by the year together. Surely I must either see a result for my labour and be glad, or else, failing to see it, I

must be ready to break my heart if I be a true servant of the great Master. We ought to expect results: if we had expected more we should have seen more, but a lack of expectation has been a great cause of failure in God's workers.

But we may not expect to see all the seed which we sow spring up the moment we sow it. Sometimes, glory be to God, we have but to deliver the word, and straightway men are converted: the reaper overtakes the sower, in such instances, but it is not always so. Some sowers have been diligent for years upon certain plots of ground, and apparently all has been in vain, till at the last the harvest has come, a harvest which, speaking after the manner of men, had never been reaped if they had not persevered to the end. This world, as I believe, is to be converted to Christ; but not to-day, nor to-morrow, peradventure not for many an age; but the sowing of the centuries is not being lost, it is all working on towards the grand ultimatum. A crop of mushrooms may soon be produced, but a forest of oaks will not reward the planter till generations of his children have mouldered into the dust. It is ours to sow, and to hope for quick reaping; but still we ought to remember that "the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain," and so must we. We are to expect results, but not to be dispirited if we see them not to-day or on the morrow.

We are also to expect to see the good seed grow, but not always after our fashion. We are nearly all of us like children, for still there are not many fathers, and like children we are apt to be impatient. Your little boy sowed mustard and cress yesterday in his little garden. This afternoon Master Johnny will be turning over the ground to see if the seed is growing. There is no probability that his mustard and cress will come to anything, for he will not let it alone long enough for it to grow. So is it with hasty workers; they must see the result of the gospel directly, or else they will leave off, and distrust the blessed word. Although the people may have taken the word into their minds and may be considering it, certain preachers are in such a hurry that they will allow no time for thought, no space for counting the cost, no opportunity for men to consider their ways and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart. All other seeds take time to grow but the seed of the word must grow before the speaker's eyes like magic, or he thinks nothing has been done. Such good brethren are so eager to produce blade and ear there and then, that they roast their seed in the fire of fanaticism, and it never lives at all. They make men think that they are converted, and thus effectually hinder them from coming to a saving knowledge of the truth. I am solemnly convinced that some men are prevented from being saved by being told that they are saved already, and by being puffed up with a notion of perfection when they are not even broken in heart. Perhaps if such people had been taught to look for something deeper they might not have been satisfied with receiving seed on stony ground; but now they are content with that which comes of seed sown on unbroken rocks, they exhibit a rapid development, and an equally rapid decline and fall. Let us believingly expect to see the seed grow; but let us look to see it advance after the manner of the preacher,—firstly secondly, thirdly; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear,

You are in a hurry, my brother, but it were better to exhibit the patience of principle than the heat of passion. Let all men be in a hurry to be saved, but let those who are preaching the truth be content to see men convinced of sin, delivered from self-confidence, enlightened as to the grace of God, and thus led by sure steps to faith. Some of the best of Christians do not know the exact point at which they were converted; it was a gradual process, from green blade to ripe ear, and they cannot tell exactly when the actual fruit of faith was formed in them. Some of the most thoughtful minds are not jerked on a sudden into religion, but are brought gradually into light, even as the noon of day draweth on by degrees. With many there is at first nothing but a little blade, you cannot tell whether it is not grass and grass only; their feeling looks like a natural emotion caused by the fear of hell, and this might lead to nothing effectual. Then follows a little belief, so formed as to be like the wheat-ear of faith, and yet it may be only a notion: it takes time with such persons before they show the full corn of assured faith in Jesus. Growth is often, if not generally, gradual, and shall we wish to alter God's method of working? We may expect the seed to grow, but every soil is not equally sharp and speedy, and we must not demand of God that he shall work uniformly after the same rate of speed.

We may expect also to see the seed ripen. Our work will lead up by God's grace to real faith in those he hath wrought upon by his word, and Spirit, but we must not expect to see it perfect at the first. How many mistakes have been made here. Here is a young person under impression, and some good sound brother talks with that young person and asks profound questions. He shakes his experienced head, and knits his furrowed brows. He goes into the corn-field to see how the crops are prospering, and though it is early in the year, he laments that he cannot see an ear of corn; indeed, he perceives nothing but mere grass. "I cannot see a trace of corn," says he. No, brother, of course you cannot; for you will not be satisfied with the blade as an evidence of life, but must insist upon seeing everything at full growth at once. If you had looked for the blade you would have found it; and it would have encouraged you. For my own part, I am glad even to perceive a faint desire, a feeble longing, a degree of uneasiness, or a measure of weariness of sin, or a craving after mercy. Will it not be wise for you, also, to allow things to begin at the beginning, and to be satisfied with their being small at the first? See the blade of desire, and then watch for more. Soon you shall see a little more than desire; for there shall be conviction and resolve, and after that a feeble faith, small as a mustard seed, but bound to grow. Do not despise the day of small things. Do not examine the new-born babe about Calvinism in its different shades, to see whether he is sound after your idea of soundness; ten to one he is a long way off sound, and you will only worry the dear heart by introducing difficult questions. Speak to him about his being a sinner, and Christ a Saviour, and you will in this way water him, so that his grace in the ear will become the full corn. It may be that there is not much that looks like wheat about him yet, but by-and-by you shall say, "Wheat! ah, that it is, if I know wheat. This man is a true ear of corn, and gladly will I place him among my Master's sheaves." If you crush the blades, where will the ears come from? If you cut off the green

ears, where will the ripe ones be? Expect grace in your converts, but do not look to see glory in them just yet. It is enough if you see heaven begun: do not look to see it complete in them here below.

Expect, then, brethren—for you may expect it—to see a harvest, but do not expect to find every seed springing up. "There," says one, "that is a discouraging word." It may be so, but it is a true word. There is an old worldly proverb which saith, "Blessed are those who expect nothing, for they shall never be disappointed." I do not believe in that proverb, but I believe in a moderate form of it: "Blessed are those who do not expect what is unreasonable, for they will not get it." If you young people who begin to work for God expect that every word you speak will be useful to all who hear it, it will not happen, and you will grow discouraged; therefore I would raise your expectation as high as truth permits, and no higher. I would have you climb to the top of the ladder; but if I encourage you to go any higher you will soon be going down the other side, under the notion that you are ascending. I never like to see a man expecting what he will not obtain. Now, I know that some of our seed will fall among thorns, and some in stony places, and I do not despair when it happens to be so. I do not expect when I preach the gospel that everybody who hears it will receive it, because I know it will be a savour of life unto life to some, and of death unto death to others. I pull the net in, hauling away with all my might; but I know that when it comes to shore it will contain some queer things that are not fish, which will have to be thrown away, and I am heartily glad that there will also be in it a cheering number of good fishes. The results of our ministry in these days will be mixed, even as they were when Paul preached, and some believed and some believed not; we must be prepared for that, and yet I bid you let your expectations be very large, for you may have sixty or a hundred-fold of fruit from the seed if God be with you, and that will abundantly repay you, even if the crows and the worms should eat their share of the grain.

IV. The last head is this, WHAT SLEEP WORKERS MAY TAKE, AND WHAT THEY MAY NOT TAKE; for it is said of this sowing man, that he sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed springs and grows up he knoweth not how. They say a farmer's trade is a good one because it is going on while he is abed and asleep; and surely ours is a good trade, too, when we serve our Master by sowing good seed, for it is growing even while we are asleep.

But how may a good workman for Christ lawfully go to sleep? I answer, first, he may sleep the sleep of restfulness born of confidence. You are afraid the kingdom of Christ will not come, are you? Who asked you to tremble for the ark of the Lord? Afraid for the infinite Jehovah that his purposes will fail? Shame on you! Your anxiety dishonours your God. You degrade him by a suspicion of his failing. Shall Omnipotence be defeated? You had better sleep than wake to play the part of Uzzah. Rest patiently, God's will will be done, and his kingdom will come, and his chosen will be saved, and Christ shall see of the travail of his soul. Take the sweet sleep which God gives to his beloved, the sleep of perfect confidence, such as Jesus slept in the hinder part of the ship when it was tossed with tempest. The cause of God never was in jeopardy, and never will be; the seed sown is insured by omnipotence

and must produce its harvest. In patience possess your soul, and wait till the harvest comes, for the pleasure of the Lord must prosper in the hands of Jesus.

Also take that sleep which leads to a happy waking of joyful expectancy. Get up in the morning and feel that the Lord is ruling all things for the accomplishment of his own purpose. Look for it. If you do not sleep you certainly will not wake up in the morning refreshed, and ready for more work. If it were possible for you to sit up all night and eat the bread of carefulness you would be unfit to attend to the service which your Master appoints for the morning; therefore take your rest and be at peace, and work with calm dignity; for the matter is safe in the Lord's hands.

Take your rest because you have consciously resigned the work into God's hands. After you have spoken the word resort to God in prayer, and commit it into God's hand, and then do not fret about it. It cannot be in better keeping—leave it there.

But do not sleep the sleep of unwatchfulness. The farmer sows his seed, but he does not therefore forget it. He has to mend his fences to keep the cattle out; it may be he has to drive away birds, to remove weeds, or to prevent floods. While he is not sitting down to watch the growth, he has plenty else to do. He never sleeps the sleep of indifference or even of inaction; for each season has its demand upon him. He has sown one field, but he has another to sow. He has sown, but he has also to reap; and if reaping is done, he has something else to do. He has never done; for in one part or other of the farm he is needed. His sleep is but an interlude that gives him strength to continue in his occupations. Consider that the parable teaches us that we have not to intrude into the domain of God; but with regard to the secret working of truth upon man's mind, we are to take our rest, and go on our way, serving our day and generation according to the will of God.

I want you, dear brethren and sisters, to come to that point this morning. "Lord, this is thy work. Lord, thou canst do thine own work. Lord, do thine own work—we entreat and beseech thee to do it. Lord, help us to do *our* work, both at the beginning of the chapter and at the end of the chapter, confident that thou wilt not fail in the middle of the chapter; but that thou wilt do thy work. Help us to exercise faith in thee, and to go about our labour in the confidence that thou art with us, and we are workers together with thee." Up, brethren, to the mountain; to the brow of Carmel this afternoon, up there and pray that God will send a shower of heavenly rain by his Spirit. Up, Elijah; put your head between your knees and cry till you are certain that the cloud, though it be little at first as a man's hand, will cover all the earth and water the land with blessing. Up and pray that God would sweep away all the doubts which, like locusts, devour the church to-day, and all love of sin and all rejection of Christ, that at this hour, even at this hour, God may glorify himself by the feeble hand of his sower while he scatters the seed. I beg your prayers, my dear and faithful friends, this afternoon, and this evening, that the word of the Lord may be divinely victorious. I stand back that God may work, and then come forward that God may work through me, and to him be praise for ever. Amen.

The Choice of a Leader

"And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master"—Luke vi. 39, 40.

MAN can hardly be retained in the place of wisdom, even if brought thither. Truth lies between two extremes, and man, like a pendulum, swings either too much this way or that. He abides not long in one stay, but tosses from side to side; never, except by divine grace, finding rest in the middle point of wisdom at all. Two extremes exist in reference to the pilgrimage and scholarship of life. Some assert that man needs no guide whatever. Is he not a noble creature, gifted with high intelligence? Can he not reason and judge, and understand and discern? He can surely find his own way without direction from without. As a learner, why needs he a teacher? He can instruct himself. Is he not possessed of science? Has he not already found out many inventions? Such self-sufficient boasters will not, therefore, condescend to sit at the feet of a master, or follow the track of a guide, and consequently they frequently become erratic, singular, lawless, and unreasonable in their modes of thought, and even of act. Into the mazes of infidelity and atheism such pilgrims wander; into foolishness and strong delusion such teachers of themselves conduct their own minds. This scheme is dangerous, but its opposite pole is not less so. Deliver a man from rationalism, and he often swings into superstition, and says, "I see that I need a guide, I will take the one nearest to hand." Finding a guide constituted by this authority or that, the man who has ceased to use his judgment surrenders himself at once to his leadership and reckons that to question is to be guilty of wicked unbelief. Without considering whether the guide be a seeing man or blind, or the teacher an instructed and qualified instructor, the credulous yield themselves up to priests or leaders, and are misled. Weary of thinking,

they beg others to think for them, and there leave the matter. This is the religion of a great many, and they find much peace in it; the peace of slumbering stupidity. They meet with a church which claims to be venerable for antiquity, and then they believe whatever that church chooses to teach: they consider that they have no right any longer to judge or to use their understandings. They hang conscience and reason in a sling, as if they were broken arms, no longer usable, and give themselves up to be wheeled about like invalids in the chairs of tradition and dogmatism; they do not dare to question;—that would spoil the whole thing;—they shut their eyes and let other people see for them, nay, they shut their eyes to be guided by blind men; they give up thinking, to be directed by those who have also given up thinking, who have long ago shut their eyes and opened their mouths to take in whatever a supreme council or a pope may please to put into them. Between these two extremes there is a narrow path of right, and happy is he who finds it, namely, the honestly and sincerely judging who the leader and teacher should be, the discovery that a leader has been appointed in the person of the Lord Jesus, and a teacher in the divine Spirit, and then a complete, willing and believing submission of the whole man to this infallible guidance. Happy is that man who neither in the pride of intellect determines to be a guide to himself, and so to be guide to a fool; nor in the indolence of superstition surrenders himself up to be guided by his fellow man, call him priest, or pope, or minister, or what you will; but who, having found that God has sent his Son into this world of ours to be the Captain of salvation, who shall bring many sons into glory, follows where his commander leads the way, and having seen this same Jesus appointed to be the prophet of his people, delights to sit at his feet and receive of his words; reason, affection, contemplation, and will, all finding perfect rest in him. He with his eyes open follows the All-seeing One, and with his mind illuminated, becomes a disciple of the Eternal Light.

It is clear that the most important thing, if we are agreed that we need a guide, is to examine the claims of those who aspire to the office. Some take a guide because, as I have said before, he is appointed by authority; he happens to be the parson of the parish, or the family minister, and he is at once accepted without consideration. He would be a very foolish person who would in climbing the mountains of Switzerland take a guide merely because he professed to be one, and carried the usual certificates, if upon looking at him it was clear that the man was stone blind. Would you say that does not matter, he says he is appointed by authority? Would you go to the top of Mont Blanc with him? If so, he would soon conduct you into a crevasse, and there would be an end to your folly. Yet multitudes resolve upon taking their religion by prescription, feeling confident that what is patronised by the great, and established and endowed by the nation, must of course be right. Whether the guide can see or not seems to be a trifle, but he must have been properly ordained, and duly inducted; if that be settled, the unthinking many ask no more. For my part, I like to look at my guide's eyes; I like to know whether he has ever traversed the country, and whether he has had experience of the way; and if he cannot satisfy me on those points I look elsewhere, to one

who is all sight, and has had all experience, even the Lord Jesus. His authority I cannot question; I take for granted all that he teaches me. I am glad to be a seeing man following a seeing leader, and I endeavour to be an intelligent scholar learning of a wise and sympathetic teacher.

Our text has much wisdom about it as to this matter; for, first, *it announces to us a great general principle*, as a warning, namely, that a disciple does not get above his Master, but becomes like him: secondly, *it gives a special application* of the great general principle to Christ, that as we are perfected we shall become like him, even as in the case of all other disciples who grow like their masters. After these points, I shall try to use the text for the encouragement of those who desire Christ as their Master, by saying that *we may put the fact mentioned in the text to a practical test.*

I. Let us take THE GREAT GENERAL PRINCIPLE as a warning.

Several truths are involved in the text, and these all illustrate the main point. It is evident that *the disciple is generally drawn to the master who is most like himself;*—the blind man is led by the blind. It is not merely that birds of a feather flock together, and hence men of kindred minds form association with each other, but there is about us all a natural tendency to admire our own image, and to be willing to submit to any who are superior to us, and yet are of our type. A teacher who does not shock our prejudices, but shows a sympathy with our tastes, we are at home with at once. The priest is like the people because the people are pleased to have him so. It is true of teachers as of idols, "they that make them are like unto them." If the blind man only could see he would not choose a blind man to be his guide, but as he cannot see he meets with one who talks as blind men talk, who judges things as they are in the dark, and who does not know what sighted men know, and therefore never reminds the blind man of his infirmity, and at once he says, "This is my ideal of a man, he is exactly the leader I require, and I will commit myself to him." So the blind man takes the blind man to be his guide, and this is the reason why error has been so popular. No error would live if it did not chime in with some evil prospensity of human nature, if it did not gratify some error in man to which it is congruous. Idolatry is a prevailing sin because man is alienated from God who is a Spirit, and in his carnal folly demands a god whom his senses can apprehend. When you hear of crowds going over to Popery do not wonder at it. Popery is the religion of depraved human nature put into shape by the devil, and therefore it is no marvel that the nations are fascinated by it, for what they love and what the god of this world sweetens to their tooth must go down with them. Popery and other forms of sacramentarianism are a soft bed for idle limbs; and as surely as a lazy man lies down, so surely does a superstitious man take to these systems. Give a superstitious man the information contained in the Bible, and a pair of scissors to cut his coat according to his shape, and Popery in some shape or other will be the religion which he will cut out for himself; consequently it is popular. You cannot at first understand how the blind man who sets up for a guide could expect to find clients; neither would he, only there are so many other blind people about who know

nothing about his blindness, and are sure to come to him. Mind you are not so blind yourself as to follow their example. Young man, mind who it is you choose for a guide. Your tendencies will be to select a wrong one, because your tendencies themselselves are wrong. Pray that you may begin aright the journey of life having grace infused into your hearts, that you may choose the Christ of God who is "the way, the truth, and the life." O Lord let no soul here be so blind as to choose blind atheism, blind scepticism, or blind superstition to be his leader, but do thou take the blind by the hand and lead them by a way that they know not and by paths which they have not seen. Do thou these things unto them, and do not forsake them.

Having chosen his tutor, the student gradually becomes more and more like his Master, or, having taken his guide, the tendency is to tread more closely in his footsteps, and obey his rules more fully every day. We must be all conscious that we imitate those whom we admire. Love has a strange influence over our nature, to mould it into the form beloved. A true disciple is like clay on the wheel, and his Master fashions him after his own image. We may be scarcely conscious of it, but we are most surely being conformed to the likeness of those to whose influence we submit ourselves. Whoever then your Master may be, dear friend, you are changing into his image: if you choose to be led by the votary of pleasure, you will become more and more frivolous; if you admire the slave of avarice, you will become avaricious; if you feel the sway of the minion of vice, you will grow vicious yourself. If a man who despises the word of God becomes your hero, you will ere long despise it too: while you are gazing upon him with admiration, a kind of photography is going on, and you, like a sensitive plate, receive his image. I charge you, therefore, to be careful who becomes your guide.

And mark, *the pupil does not go beyond the tutor*, nor does the man who submits to be led go beyond his guide. Such a case is very rarely found; indeed, I may say never; for when the one who is led goes beyond his leader, he is not in truth led any longer: rarely enough does it ever come to that. Men, if they outstrip their leaders, generally do so in the wrong direction. They seldom exaggerate their virtues, those they frequently omit, but they usually exaggerate peculiarities, follies, failings, and faults. It is said that in the court of Richard III., because the king was round-shouldered, the courtiers gradually became humpbacked, and we have seen a whole country idiotic enough, not in the last century, but in this century, to have almost all its women limping because a popular princess was afflicted with a temporary lameness. It is the way of mankind; they imitate each other as if by instinct, and this is the only excuse I know of for Darwin's theory of our having descended from the ape. Imitativeness is well developed in us, but if left to itself it works with a bias the wrong way, and the imitation is most forcible in the direction of deformity and defect. In music, and painting, and poetry, and literature, men of a school seldom excel their master, or, if they do, they leave him; but the habit is to perpetuate the master's mannerisms and weaknesses. It is even more so in the art of living. Young men, in the task of choosing a master for your faith, I beseech you be careful to have none but the best, for

you will not excel, but rather fall behind the master you follow. If you are choosing a leader, choose one who knows the road, for if he has made some blunders you will make ten times as many, and in all probability you will exaggerate each one of his mistakes.

The most solemn truth remains to be noted. *When a man chooses a bad leader for his soul, at the end of all bad leadership there is a ditch.* A man teaches error which he declares he has drawn from Scripture, and he backs it up with texts perverted and abused. If you follow that error, and take its teacher for a leader, you may for a time be very pleased with yourself for knowing more than the poor plain people who keep to the good old way; but, mark my word, there is a ditch at the end of the error. You do not see it yet, but there it is, and into it you will fall if you continue to follow your leader. At the end of error there is often a moral ditch, and men go down, down, down, they scarce know why, till presently, having imbibed doctrinal error, their moral principles are poisoned, and like drunken men they find themselves rolling in the mire of sin. At other times the ditch beyond a lesser error may be an altogether damnable doctrine. The first mistake was comparatively trifling, but, as it placed the mind on an inclined plane, the man descended almost as a matter of course, and almost before he knew it, found himself given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie. The blind man and his guide, whatever else they miss, will be sure to find the ditch, they need no sight to obtain an abundant entrance into that. Alas! to fall into the ditch is easy, but how shall they be recovered? I would earnestly entreat especially professing Christians, when novelties of doctrine come up, to be very cautious how they give heed to them. I bid you remember the ditch. A small turn of the switch on the railway is the means of taking the train to the far east or to the far west: the first turn is very little indeed, but the points arrived at are remote. There are new errors which have lately come up which your fathers knew not, with which some are mightily busy, and I have noticed when men have fallen into them their usefulness ceased. I have seen ministers go only a little way in speculative theories, and gradually glide from latitudinarianism into Socinianism or Atheism. Into these ditches thousands fall. Others are precipitated into an equally horrible pit, namely, the holding nominally of all the doctrines in theory and none of them in fact. Men hold truths nowadays with the bowels taken out of them, and the very life and meaning torn away. There are members and ministers of evangelical denominations who do not believe evangelical doctrine, or if they do believe it they attach but little importance to it; their sermons are essays on philosophy, tinged with the gospel. They put a quarter of a grain of gospel into an Atlantic of talk, and poor souls are drenched with words to no profit. God save us from ever leaving the old gospel, or losing its spirit, and the solid comfort which it brings; yet into the ditch of lifeless profession and philosophic dreaming we may soon fall if we commit ourselves to wrong leaderships. All this should prevent us, as I think, from taking any man whatever as our leader, for if we trust to any mere man, though he may be right in ninety-nine of the hundred, he is wrong somewhere, and our tendency will be to be more influenced by his one wrong point than by any one

of his right ones. Depend upon it in matters of religion that ancient malediction is abundantly verified, "Cursed is he that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." There is one whom you may follow implicitly, and one only. There is one whom you may trust without reserve, and only one,—the man Christ Jesus, the Son of God: but if you do not wish to be led into errors of heart and practice, beware of men, and follow none but Jesus, and no footsteps but the footsteps of that flock which follows at his heel. You will do best not even to follow the sheep, but to follow the Shepherd only, and to do that even if you walk alone. May the Holy Spirit be given you to lead you into all truth. Thus much upon the great principle; let it act as a warning.

II. ITS SPECIAL APPLICATION TO OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST is our encouragement. If we have the Lord Jesus Christ as our leader we certainly cannot go beyond our leader, but we shall be privileged to grow more and more like him, and we shall be perfected according to our text, as our leader is.

First, *this is what we might have expected.* We see ordinarily, as we have said, that the disciple grows like his Master, but with such a Master the process becomes more sure. With such a Master, of whom these lips cannot speak well enough, a Master the latchets of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, it may well come to pass that we are melted down with love and poured out into the mould of obedience. He is the Creator, can he not create in us his image? From such an one as he is we confidently expect it.

For, observe, the teaching itself is such that it must have power over hearts that yield to it. His doctrine is almighty love; all his teaching is divine, and yet so broken down to human capacity that it exactly suits the man who has taken the yoke of Christ upon him, and determinded to learn of him. Other masters teach us crooked and doubtful lessons, and when learned too often the best wisdom is to unlearn them; but with our Lord the teaching is most sure, most heavenly, most potent, and we feel within ourselves that it is so true, so noble, so grand, that it comes to us with authority, and not as the word of man.

If I knew only what Jesus teaches I should conclude that a teacher who gives forth such doctrines and such precepts must influence his disciples; but it is not in his teaching alone that his influence lies; the most potent charm is *himself.* When he spake here below they said, "Never man spake like this man," and the reason was because "never man lived like this man." His word was with power, but then he himself was THE WORD. If you view the precepts of Christ as embodied in his life they glow with beauty and flash with power. You can bear from such a teacher what you could not have endured from anybody else, for his character gives him a right to speak. Many of his precepts would have seemed perfectly preposterous had they first fallen from the lips of fallible men, for their hearers would have cried out, "Physician, heal thyself." Coming from him they come naturally as good fruit from a good tree; they are the necessary outgushings of such a nature and such a life. Who can help being persuaded when the arguments live before our eyes? We are overpowered by the grandeur of the Redeemer's goodness, by the splendour of his love, the infinity of his self-sacrifice. Jesus commands our faith by the revelation of

himself, and by that same manifestation he conforms us to himself. Was ever such a life as his? Was ever such a death? Was ever such an altogether lovely person as his? Was ever such perfection as his? In life he was so outspoken and yet so gentle, so courageous and yet so kind, so unflinching and yet so tender, wearing his heart upon his sleeve in the transparency of truth, but prudent and guarding himself with infallible wisdom; a match for all, however they might assail him, and yet apparently never on his guard at all, but as a child among them, the holy child Jesus. Oh, if you sit at Jesus' feet you will not only learn of him and his teaching will have power over you, but you will learn *him*, for he himself is his own best lesson. Never did eyes look up into those dear eyes of Jesus, which are "as the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, washed with milk and fitly set," but they were themselves cleansed and purified till they became "like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Beth-rabbim." Who could bear the Lord Jesus on his heart, like a cluster of myrrh, and not be perfumed by his presence? Who could be with him and not be like him?

We feel quite sure that the disciples will grow like their Master in the case of Jesus, because he inspires them with an intense love to himself, which flames forth in enthusiasm for him. Get a teacher whom all the scholars love and admire, and they will soon learn. Make them enthusiastic for him, and no lesson will be too hard. This our dear and blessed Lord, of whom these lips cannot speak as they should, has done. We admire, we love, nay, we adore him: he is our God, our all in all, and hence we pant to be moulded at his will. Live for him? Yes, we find it to be our joy, for the love of Christ constraineth us. Die for him? Ay, his saints in all ages have rejoiced to lay down their lives for him. Full of fervour, and fired with enthusiasm, they have suffered losses and reproaches for his name's sake. If the teacher inspires such enthusiasm, doubtless he will fashion the disciples in his likeness.

Best of all, our Great Teacher has a spirit with him, a mighty Spirit, God himself, the Holy Ghost, and when he teaches, he teaches not with words alone, but with a power which goes beyond the ear into the heart itself. Other teachers, except as they follow Christ, must depend upon the charms of eloquence, or the force of argument, but our Lord, though most eloquent of all, for his lips are like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, though full of arguments, for his is the wisdom of God, relies upon the energy which he felt when he said, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord hath anointed me." The divine Spirit casts a light into the soul, of such a brilliance that things not seen stand out in clearest evidence, and things hoped for are grasped in their very substance. With that light there comes also life to feel, power to realise, and discernment to judge, and so the soul is led into all truth, and the scholar receives the lessons of his lord in their life and energy. Who else can give this Spirit? By what other teacher can the Holy Ghost be breathed into us? Who would not sit at the feet of a Master so transcendently above all others in possessing such an infinite gift? I would to God while I am speaking thus, that some here present would say, "Fain would I commit myself to that great teacher." Remember,

beloved, if you want him to be your Master, he equally longs for you to be his disciple.

I think I have now shown that it was to be expected that with such a Master the disciple should become like him. Now let me observe that *this was virtually promised.* It is promised to us in effect in the great decree of predestination, "for whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." This is the great purpose of God, that Christ may be the first-born among many brethren, and that the brethren may be a company in whose faces the Lord shall discern the image of the Only Begotten. What God predestinates we may confidently expect.

It is promised to us in the very name of Jesus Christ, for that name is Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins." But saving men from their sins is the bringing of them back into a condition of purity and holiness. This, indeed, is the salvation which we preach, not the mere forgiveness of sin, as some think, but the conquering of sin, the driving out of sin, the making of men like to the Lord Jesus by the Spirit of God. The very name of Jesus tells us that he means to make his disciples free from sin as he is.

We know also that this was our Lord's object, for the design of Christ's life is clearly seen in his last prayer when he prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." You can see that his one object is to make his people holy, as he is holy, to keep them from evil even as he was kept, and to make them conquerors over sin even as he conquered. All his life long he laboured at this with the twelve and with others who followed with him, and his last prayer breathes this, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Everywhere this is seen to be true. The relationships which he assumes suppose it, for brethren are like their brother, and friends are like their friend. The metaphors which he uses imply the same thing, for the ingrafted branch drinks in the nature of the stem, the spouse grows like her husband, and the members of the body are of the same nature as the head. The mystical Christ it not like the image of the Babylonian monarch's dream with head of gold and feet of clay, but Christ is one throughout, the grace which dwells in the head, transforming the whole body. It is our delightful expectation that "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," and then shall we be satisfied, for we shall wake up in his likeness.

Well, brethren, what we might have expected, and what God has thus virtually promised, *has been actually seen,* for the disciples have been like their Lord, and this is where I want to lay the most stress. Have not the disciples been like their Lord in points of character? It would be very absurd for me to say that the Old Testament saints were disciples of Christ in a literal sense, and yet in spirit they all were so, for the gospel is the same in all ages, and it is the same light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. The inner teaching of the Spirit was the same to Abel and to Noah as it was to John and Paul, and while apostles looked back to Jesus and were enlightened, patriarchs looked forward and had light too. Now each of the saints

in the olden time had some likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of a few of them, and you will see some of his beauties. Abel reveals his righteousness, and Enoch his walking with God. Job shows his patience, and Abraham his faith; Moses his meekness, and Samuel his power of intercession. Daniel is like him in his integrity, and Jeremiah in his weeping. Like drops of morning dew, all these reflected the light of the Sun of Righteousness. In the New Testament we see the transforming power of his teaching in many instances. Peter and John were like their Master, for we read that when their enemies "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." The likeness was so striking that they were obliged to confess it. Take John alone, for a minute, and who can read his epistles without saying, "Even thus his Master spake?" John was far behind his Lord, but yet how marvellously like him! You have smiled at your children sometimes when you have seen your own ways repeated in them. You have beheld your own peculiarities as in a looking-glass. Almost unconsciously they have been yourself in miniature. So was it evidently with John. If it be true, as tradition saith, that he was carried into the assembly when he was too old to walk, and was wont to say to them, "Little children, love one another: little children, love one another," it was so like our Lord Jesus Christ, you might have thought the Master had returned to earth. As for Paul, in many aspects he is the counterpart of his Lord, and as I read that strange passage in Romans which staggers some, where he says, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, according to the flesh," I am led to say, "Herein he resembles that Blessed One who was actually made a curse for us, as it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Now, all the saints of God, more or less, according as they have fully been disciples of Jesus, display his characteristics. I cannot stop this morning to tell you what characteristics I see in you which are like my Lord; I rejoice that I do know brothers and sisters here of whom I have often said to myself, "I can see their Master in them." I wish I could say so of all of you, but still I am glad to see in so many the points of true likeness to Jesus, the family characteristics which mark all the children of God. There are little touches of their Father in all the heirs of salvation which make us feel that they belong to the same family as Jesus, they could not have learned those ways, they must have been imparted by a birth from above.

It is a very noteworthy thing that those who are disciples of Christ even become like him as to their life-story. Going back to the old saints as being really disciples of the doctrine of the Redeemer, there is Melchizedek bringing forth bread and wine to refresh Abraham—would you not have thought it was Christ himself? There is Isaac gently submitting to his father while he draws the knife to slay him—could you not have said that it was Jesus? There is Joseph making himself known to his brethren, and ruling all Egypt for their good—might we not have thought that it was our Lord come on earth before his time to bless his chosen ones? Yonder is David coming back with Goliath's head, while all the maidens of Israel rejoice around

him—could you not have thought it was our Lord returning from Edom with dyed garments from Bosra? The saints are types of him because they are of the same type as he is. As for the disciples after Christ came you will often find them in positions which set forth Jesus Christ most evidently. See Stephen boldly declaring the gospel until his enemies stone him. Have you not read of his Master many times, "They would have stoned him, but he conveyed himself out of their sight"? Look at Paul at Lystra. They are about to sacrifice to him: it makes you think of days when the crowd cried "Hosanna, Hosanna." Lo, the apostle rebukes the throng, and now they are stoning him, and it recalls to your memory the time when the crowd shouted, "Crucify him, crucify him; away with such a fellow from the earth." Read the story of Paul in the shipwreck, when he says to the captain of the ship, and to the officer of the troops, "Be of good cheer, for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you." You might almost have thought it was the Saviour himself saying to the winds and waves, "Peace, be still," there was so much of his Master in him. Indeed Christ is in all his members; his life is written out again in their lives. Beloved, I could mention many saints of modern times in whose lives we may see Jesus. That poor woman who dropped into the treasury her two mites, which were all her living; is she not very like to him who gave up all for us, and became poor that we through his poverty might be rich. Others are like to the woman who brake the alabaster box of precious ointment, to give their best things to her Lord. Do they not remind you of the lover of our souls, who brake the precious alabaster box of his body and filled all earth and heaven with the perfume? Everyone who gives up self for God's glory is Jesus in miniature. Look at John Howard going about among the dungeons of Europe, spying out poor prisoners to do them good. Is not that Christ over again, with glad tidings for the captives? Or John Williams landing at Erromanga, with his life in his hand, to convert cannibals; was not that laying down his life for the sheep? Now, dear friend, do you think if we had your life before us we could make out anything like Jesus Christ in it? If you are his disciple it will be so. There will be in your biography as your children will read it—for they will read it better than anybody else—as your wife will read it, as those you work with will read it, something which looks as if it were extracted from the life of Jesus. Students in Christ's college must be like their Tutor, and they are. I dare say the brother is present here of whom I am about to speak, and if so he will be sorry to hear me tell the story, and would stop my mouth if he could; I will, however, make bold to go on. I know a house painter who was working with other men over the top of the Great Northern Railway, at a great height. One of his fellow workmen had been drinking very heavily, and was unsteady on the lofty scaffold. He said to himself, "That man will never get down alive," and rather than he should perish he actually offered to carry him down on his back. I believe it would have been death to them both if the attempt had been made, but he cheerfully offered. He said, "My soul is safe; I am a Christian; I am afraid you will be killed, and if you are your soul will be lost. I will carry you down if you

will only keep quiet." The man rejected the kind offer, though persuaded again and again, and alas, in trying to descend he fell into the middle of the railway, from a dreadful height, and was taken up dead. When I heard of my good brother, a humble member of the church doing that, I thought, "There is our Master, revealed in his disciple." Our life is a painting, and if we are in Christ's studio there will be traces of his hand, and men will exclaim that was no common painter; that stroke, that line, is just the line that the great Master used to make; I am sure he has put in those touches." O brethren, we need none of us wish to be originals; let us plagarise Christ, and that will be the grandest originality. God help us in this.

Now I was going to say, but time has fled, that Christ's disciples grow like him in their struggles and in their temptations. They are met by Satan as Christ was, they are tried by the world as Christ was, they are assailed by Sadducean unbelief and Pharisaic superstition as Christ was, they have to go through the same fight, and, blessed be God, they win the same victories. Christ's disciples overcome sin; by their Master's help they rise above doubt, they vanquish the world, and they stand in purity and faith. By-and-by they shall be like him in their rewards. "To him that overcometh," saith he, "will I give to sit upon my throne, even as I have overcome and have sat down with my Father upon his throne."

It is a beautiful subject, if I had the power to work it out, the way in which the disciple of Jesus thus by sure steps becomes perfected into the image of Christ, till the likeness is so near and so close that even the blear eyes of this wicked world in the dim atmosphere of its ignorance cannot help seeing that the man is like the Master.

III. Now, lastly, we will dwell for two or three minutes upon this encouraging fact, that WE MAY PUT ALL THIS TO THE TEST this morning if we will. Brethren and sisters, if you are not disciples of Jesus Christ, remember he will receive you. He will receive you though you have been to other masters, and learned a great deal under them, all of which you will have to unlearn. It is a very easy thing to take a man and teach him if his mind is clear and clean, but you have learned a great deal that you will have to forget. O you of forty, fifty, or sixty, what a world of mischief there is in you that will have to come out. Well, my Master will take you for pupils, though you have been with other masters all this while; and, though you do not know even the rudiments of what he is going to teach, he will take you. My Lord Jesus keeps an A B C school; he begins with the infants. What a mercy it is that he takes such poor, stupid heads as ours, who know nothing except what we ought not to know. And I will add, if you have but very little capacity, or none at all, it does not matter.

> "He takes the fool, and makes him know
> The wonders of his dying love."

Not many great men, not many mighty are chosen; but God has chosen the poor of this world, and things that are not, and things that are despised, yea, and weak things and foolish things, has God chosen. Come to him, for if you are incapable, he is not, and his capacity will soon overcome your incapacity. You say, "I cannot learn." Ah, but you do not know

how well he can teach, for he can teach so well that even those who think they cannot learn are soon instructed in his school. Stand not back, dear friend, because you cannot pay the fee, for my Master's is a free school; he takes nothing from us, but he gives everything to us. The only admission ticket that you want is simply to be willing to be taught, to be conscious that you need teaching and guiding, and to submit yourself to his guidance and instruction. Are you willing so to do? "Oh," say you, "I shall grieve him till he gives me up." Well, I have often thought so. I do not wonder that you are troubled with that thought; it has often come across me when I see what little progress I have made after being so many years in his school. If I had any human master he would have been out of patience with me long ago, but the Lord Jesus Christ never gives up a scholar; having once commenced to teach, he continues his divine lessons till they are fully learned, and the more difficult it is for him to teach the more honour it will be when he gets all his scholars educated for the skies. He will not brook a defeat in this matter; he will overcome ignorance, and sin, and hardness of heart, and infirmity, and incapacity, till he shall have instructed us in the lore of heaven, and made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Come, dear brethren and sisters, you that are scholars of Christ, let us sit at his feet, let us follow in his ways more closely than ever. And you, dear friends, who as yet are not in his school, he says to you, "Whoso is simple let him turn in hither; as for him that wanteth understanding let him eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled." May the good Lord incline your hearts to learn of him, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Bankrupt Debtors Discharged

"And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both"—Luke vii. 42.

THE two debtors differed very considerably in the amounts which they owed: the one was in arrears five hundred pence, and the other fifty. There are differences in the guilt of sins, and in the degrees of men's criminality. It would be a very unfair and unrighteous thing to say that all men are exactly alike in the extent of their transgression. Some are honest and upright, kind and generous, even though they be but natural men: while others appear to be of a malicious, envious, selfish disposition, and rush into evil, sinning, as it were, with both hands greedily. The man who is moral, sober, and industrious is only a fifty pence debtor as compared with the vicious, drunken blasphemer whose debt is written at five hundred pence. Our Saviour recognizes the distinction, because it exists and cannot justly be overlooked. There are distinctions among unconverted men, very great distinctions. One of them, a young man, came to Jesus, and he had so many fine traits in his character that the Lord looking upon him loved him; whereas when the Pharisees gathered about him our Lord looked round upon them with indignation. The soil, which was none of it yet sown with the good seed, yet varied greatly, and some of it was honest and good ground before the sower came to it. Sinners differ from each other.

But I call your particular notice to this fact—that though there was one point of difference in the two debtors, there were three points of similarity; for they were both debtors: and so all men have sinned, be it little or be it much: and, secondly, they were both alike bankrupt, neither of them could meet his debt; the man who owed fifty pence could no more pay than he who owed five hundred pence, so that they were both insolvent debtors. But what a mercy it is that they were alike in a third point! for "when they had nothing to pay," their creditor "frankly forgave them both."

Oh, my dear hearers, we are all alike in the first two things! Oh that we might be all of us alike in this last point, that the Lord our God may grant to every one of us the free remission of sins according to the riches of his grace through Christ Jesus! Why should it not be so,

since Jesus is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins? There is forgiveness with God. He delighteth in mercy. He can cast all our sins into the depths of the sea, that they may not be mentioned against us any more for ever. While we are compelled to go together two-thirds of the road, what a pity it would be that we should be divided in the third portion of it! That first two-thirds of the road is a very muddy, boggy piece of way, and we sorrowfully wade along it in company,—all in debt and all of us unable to pay; but that next part of the road is well-made, smooth, and good for travellers, and it leads into the gardens of felicity. Oh that we may traverse it, and find the free pardon of God! Oh for free remission for all of us without exception! Why not? God send it of his great mercy at this good hour! To that end I wish to speak with you, dear friends; for I believe that the Lord Jesus has somewhat to say unto you, and I pray that your hearts may be open to him, crying gladly, "Master, say on!"

Our first point for consideration is, *their bankruptcy*—"they had nothing to pay"; the second is, *their free discharge*—"he frankly forgave them both"; and the third is, *the connection between these two things:* for that little word "when" marks the connection—"*when* they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both."

I. First, let us think of THEIR BANKRUPTCY. This was their condition. They were unquestionably in debt. If they could have disputed the creditor's claim, no doubt they would have done so. If they could have pleaded that they were never indebted, or that they had already paid, no doubt they would have been glad to have done so; but they could not raise a question; their debt could not be denied. Another fact was also clear to them, namely, that they had nothing to pay with. No doubt they had made diligent search; they had turned out their pockets, their cash-boxes, and their lockers, and they had found nothing; they had looked for their household goods, but these had vanished piece by piece. They had nothing at home or abroad that they could dispose of. Things had come to such a pass with them that they had neither stock nor money, nor anything in prospect which they could draw upon: they were brought to the last extremity, reduced to absolute beggary. Meanwhile, their great creditor was pressing them for settlement. That idea lies in the heart of the text. The creditor had evidently brought his over-due accounts, and had said to them, "These claims must be met. There must be an end to this state of affairs; your accounts must be discharged." They were just brought to this condition—they must confess the debt, and they must also humbly acknowledge that they had nothing to meet it with: the time for payment had come, and it found them without a penny. No condition could be much more wretched.

So far I have stated the parable, and it most truly sets forth *the condition* of every man who has not come to Jesus Christ and so received the frank forgiveness of his sins. Upon this we will enlarge. We are all by nature and by practice plunged in debt, and this is the way in which we came to be so. Hear it and mark it well. As God's creatures we from the very first owed to him the debt of obedience. We were bound to obey our Maker. It is he that made us, and not we ourselves; and we were, therefore, bound reverently to recognize our Creator,

affectionately to worship him, and dutifully to serve him. This is an obligation so natural and reasonable that nobody can dispute it. If you are the creatures of God, it is nothing more than right that you should honour him. If you receive daily the breath in your nostrils and the food that you eat from him, then you are bound to him by the ties of gratitude, and should do his will.

But, dear friends, we have not done his will. We have left undone the things we ought to have done, and we have done the things we ought not to have done, and so we have come in a second sense into his debt. We now stand liable to penalty, yea, we are condemned already. There is due from us to God, in vindication of his broken law, both suffering and death; and in the word of God we find that the righteous penalty for sin is something utterly overwhelming. "Fear him," saith Christ, "which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Yea, I say unto you, fear him! Very terrible are the metaphors and symbols by which the Holy Spirit sets forth the misery of a soul upon which the Lord pours forth his fiery indignation. The pain of loss and pain of woe which sin at last brings upon guilty men are inconceivable: they are called "the terrors of the Lord." There is not one among us, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, but what owes to God's law a debt which eternity cannot fully meet, even though it be crowded with agonizing regrets. A life of forgetfulness of God and breaking of his law must be recompensed by a future life of punishment. That is where we stand: can any man be at rest while this is his condition before God? We are debtors: the debt is overwhelming; it brings with it consequences tremendous to the last degree.

And we are utterly unable to make any amends for this. If he should meet with us and call us to account we cannot answer him one of a thousand. We cannot excuse ourselves, and we cannot by any possibility render to him his righteous due. If any think they can, let me remind them of this, that to cancel the debt which we owe to God we must pay it all. God demands, righteously demands, from us the keeping of his entire law. He tells us that he that is guilty in one point is guilty of all: for God's law is like a fair vase of alabaster, lovely in its entireness; but if it be chipped in any part, it may not be presented in his court; the least flaw in it mars its perfection and destroys its value. A perfect obedience to a perfect law is that which is required by the justice of the Most High; and is there any one of us who can render it, or who can attempt to pay the penalty due for not rendering it? Our inability to obey comes of our own fault, and is part of our crime. Ah me! may none of us ever have to bear the penalty! To be banished from his presence, and from the glory of his power! to be cast away from all hope and light and joy for ever! Why, there are those at this moment in the abyss of woe who have for thousands of years endured the heavy hand of justice, and yet their debt remains undischarged even now; for they have yet to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ at the last day and answer for their transgressions. It is certain that to meet the whole payment is impossible; neither in the form of obedience, nor in the form of penalty, may we ever hope to meet it—it would be all in vain to make the attempt.

Remember, too, that if there is anything that we can do for God in

the way of obedience it is already due to him. All that I can do if I love God with all my heart and soul and strength, and my neighbour as myself, throughout the rest of my life, is already due to God: I shall but be discharging new duties as they occur—how will this affect old disobediences? In what way can I cleanse myself from my former stains by the resolve that I will not be defiled with fresh ones? If your hand be blood red can you make it clean by the mere resolution that you will not plunge it again into the dye? You know it is not so: past sin cannot be removed by future carefulness.

"Could my tears for ever flow,
Could my zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone;
Christ must save, and Christ alone."

We have nothing with which to meet our liabilities because everything that we can possibly earn or obtain in the future is already due to justice, and so we have nothing left unmortgaged, nothing of our own.

Moreover, the debt is immense and incalculable! Fifty pence is but a poor representation of what the most righteous person owes; five hundred pence is but an insignificant sum compared with the transgressions of the greater offenders. Oh, friends, when I think of my life it seems to be like the sea, made up of innumerable waves of sin; or like the sea-shore, constituted of sands, that cannot be weighed nor counted. My faults are utterly innumerable, and each one deserving death eternal. Our sins, our heavy sins, sins against light and knowledge, our foul sins, our repeated sins, our aggravated sins, our sins against our parents, our sins against all our relationships, our sins against our God, our sins with the body, our sins with the mind, our sins of forgetfulness, our sins of thought, our sins of imagination—who can reckon them up in order unto God? Who knoweth the number of his trespasses? Now, to think that we can ever meet such a debt is indeed to bolster up ourselves with a notion that is utterly absurd:—we have nothing to pay.

Moreover, I go a little further. Even if these sins were somewhat within compass, and if we were not indebted for the future as to all we even can do, yet what is there that we *can* do? Does not Paul say of himself that he was not sufficient to think anything of himself? Did not the Lord tell his Israel of old, "From me is thy fruit found"? Did not Jesus say to his disciples and even to his apostles, "Without me ye can do nothing"? Then, O bankrupt sinner, what is there good that you can do of yourself? You must first of all get the good work from God before you can perform it yourself. It is true you are to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"; but what must come first? Read the passage, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." If the Lord does not work salvation in us, we cannot work it out. Every good thing in man is the work of God, the produce of the Spirit of God operating upon the heart and mind. Men are dead in trespasses and sins, dead to all that is holy and acceptable with God, and life itself is a gift. What then can sinners do? Their bankruptcy is utter and entire; and this is true of every man that is still out of Christ—he is a debtor, and he has nothing to pay.

This being the case, I want to spend a minute in noticing *certain temptations* to which all bankrupt sinners are much subject. One of these is to try and forget their spiritual estate altogether. Some of you here to-day have never given serious thought to your souls and to your condition before God. It is an unpleasant subject. You suspect that it would be still more unpleasant if you looked into it. You want amusement, something to while away the time, because you do not care to examine into the state of your heart before God. Solomon exhorts the diligent man to know the state of his flocks, and look well to his herds; but he that is careless and idle would rather leave such enquiries, and let things go as they please. The man who is going backward in business has no pleasure in stock-taking. "Oh," says he, "don't bring me my books; I shall not sleep at nights if I look into *them*." He knows that he is sinking lower and lower, and will soon be a ruined man; and the only way in which he can endure his life is to drive dull care away by drink, or by going into company, or idle amusement. He labours to beguile the hours that he may conceal from himself his true condition. But what a fool he is! Would it not be infinitely wiser if he would look the thing in the face and have it out, and know his actual state? Such ignorance as he chooses is not bliss to a right-hearted man, but suspense and misery. I have often prayed this prayer —"Lord, let me know the very worst of my case," for I do not wish to entertain a hope that will at last deceive me. Disappointment will be bitter in proportion as false hope was sweet. This is the temptation of the bankrupt soul, to shut its eyes to unwelcome truth. The ostrich is fabled when hunted to bury its head in the sand, and conceive that the huntsman is gone when he is no longer seen. But he is not gone: the unseen danger is quite as real as if it stared us in the face. However forgetful you may be, God does not forget your sins.

Another temptation to a man in this condition is to make as good a show as he can. A man who is very near bankruptcy is often noticed for the dash he cuts. What a horse he drives as he comes up to business! What fashionable parties he gives! Just so, he desires to keep up his credit as long as ever he can. He is going to make a smash of it by-and-by, but for a season he assumes the airs of my lord, and everybody near him imagines that he has money enough and to spare. The governor of a besieged city threw loaves of bread over the wall to the besiegers, to make them believe that the citizens had such large supplies that they could afford to throw them away; yet they were starving all the while. There are some men of like manners; they have nothing that they can offer unto God, but yet they exhibit a glittering self-righteousness. Oh, they have been so good, such superior people, so praiseworthy from their youth up; they never did anything much amiss; there may be a little speck here and there upon their garments, but that will brush off when it is dry. They make a fair show in the flesh with morality and formality, and a smattering of generosity. Besides, they profess to be religious: they attend divine service, and pay their quota of the expenses. Who could find any fault with such good people? Just so; this profession is the fine horse and trap with which they too are cutting a dash just before going through the court. There is nothing at all in you, and there never was, if you are as nature has made

you; wherefore then do you try to brazen it out, and make yourself to seem somewhat when you are nothing. You may by this means deceive yourself, but certainly you will not deceive God.

Another temptation which lurks in the way of a bankrupt sinner is that of making promises of what he will do. Men in debt are generally very promising men; they will pay next week for certain; but when that next week comes, they meant the next week further on, and then payment shall be doubly certain; yet they put in no appearance even then, or, if they do, they give a bill. Is not that a precious document? is it not as good as the money itself? They evidently think so, for they feel quite as easy as if they had really paid that debt. But when the bill falls due, what then? It falls, never to rise again. Ah me! a bill is often just a lie with a stamp on it. So will debtors go on as long as they can. This is what every sinner does before he becomes cleared by the sovereign grace of God. He cries, "I mean to do better." Never mind; tell us no more what you mean to do, but do it. To promise and vow so falsely is only adding to your sins! "Oh! but you know I do not intend to go on in this way always. It is a long lane that has no turning. I shall pull up short one of these days, and then you will see." What shall we see? What we shall see; and that will not be much. Yes. We shall see the dew of promise disappear, and the morning cloud of resolution pass away. Dear sir, you cannot raise our hopes now. Neither God nor man will trust you; you have promised these twenty years, and in no one year have you made a real move in the right direction. You have not lied unto men only, but unto God, and how will you answer for it? Know you not that every promise that you make to God which you do not keep is a great addition to your transgressions, and helps to fill up the measure of your iniquities? Give up the way of lying, I pray you.

Another temptation is, always to ask for more time—as if this was all that was needed. When the debtor, in another parable, was arrested, he said to his creditor, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." We cannot pay any of our debt to-day, and yet dote upon to-morrow. Yes, it does seem such a relief to get a little longer time; somehow a vague shadowy hope seems to pervade the months to come. The sinner cries, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." It is not convenient just now, but do wait a little bit, a suitable hour will come. With this temptation Satan has destroyed multitudes of men, tempting them to ask for more time, instead of coming up to the mark at once and asking for immediate pardon. What are the fabled virtues of to-morrow? Why do men dote upon the unknown future? To immediate decision I would press you at this moment; and may God by his divine Spirit deliver you as a bird from the hand of the fowler, that you may no longer procrastinate and waste your life in disobedient delay.

This being the temptation, let me hint to those of you who are bankrupt what *your wisdom* is. It is your wisdom to face the business of your soul. Your soul-matters are the most important things you will ever have on hand, for when your wealth must be left, and your estate shall see you no more, and when your body is dead, your soul will still be living in eternal happiness or endless woe; therefore, do not let your

state in reference to God have the go-by. It is the most important matter; give it the first place. Settle this business before you attend to anything else.

Take care that you face it, like an honest man, and not as one who makes the best of a bad story. Though it be bad, yet still the best thing you can do is to go right through with it in truth and soberness before the Lord. Hope lies that way. Do not let your danger be concealed like a thief who hides in the good man's cupboard till the hour to rob his house. Suffer not the sparks to smoulder where they may consume your all. Quench the fire before you sleep. When you face the matter, be very true and sincere with yourself and with God; because you are not now dealing with creditors who may be cheated, but you are dealing with One who knows the secret thoughts and intents of your heart. Before God nothing but truth can stand; the painted hypocrite is spied out immediately. The Lord takes off all masks, and men stand before him as they really are, and not as they would seem to be; so be true with yourself. Do not take your pen and write down sixty if you owe a hundred; but put the fair hundred down. Tricks and falsehoods had better be put away once for all when you deal with God.

One thing more: it will be your wisdom to give up all attempts to pay, because you have nothing to pay with. Do not delude yourself into the idea that you will pay one day, for you never will. Do not make the slightest attempt at paying, for you cannot do it; but take quite another course, plead absolute poverty, and appeal to mercy. Say, "Lord, I have nothing, I am nothing, I can do nothing. I must throw myself upon thy grace." Of this grace I am now going to speak. May I so speak as to encourage you who are bankrupts to come to the Lord, that he may frankly forgive you all.

II. Our second head is, THEIR FREE DISCHARGE. "He frankly forgave them both." What a blessing they obtained by facing the matter! These two poor debtors, when they went into the office, were trembling from head to foot, for they had nothing to pay, and were deeply involved; but see! they come out with light hearts, for the debt is all disposed of, the bills are receipted, the records are destroyed. Even thus the Lord has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

In this free discharge I admire, first of all, *the goodness* of the great creditor. What a gracious heart he had! What kindness he showed! He said, "Poor souls, you can never pay me, but you need not be cast down because of it, for I freely cancel your debts." Oh, the goodness of it! Oh, the largeness of the heart of God! I was reading of Cæsar the other day. He had been at fierce war with Pompey, and at last he conquered him, and when he conquered him he found among the spoil Pompey's private cabinet, in which were contained letters from the various noblemen and senators of Rome who had sided with him. In many a letter there was fatal evidence against the most eminent Romans, but what did Cæsar do? He destroyed every document. He would have no knowledge of his enemies, for he freely forgave them and wished to know no more. In this Cæsar proved that he was fit to govern the nation. But look at the splendour of God when he puts all our sins into one cabinet, and then destroys the whole. If the sins of

his people be sought for they cannot now be found. He will never mention them against us any more for ever. Oh, the goodness of the infinite God, whose mercy endureth for ever! Bow before that goodness with joy.

But, then, observe *the freeness* of it—"He frankly forgave them both." They did not stand there and say, "Oh, good sir, we cannot pay," and plead and beg, as for their lives; but he freely said to them, "You cannot pay, but I can forgive. You ought never to have got into my debt, and you ought not to have broken your promises to me; but behold, I make an end of all this weary business: I freely blot out all your obligations!" Did not this open a fountain in their eyes? Did they not hasten home to their wives and children, and tell them that they were out of debt, for the beloved creditor had forgiven it all most freely? This is a fair picture of the grace of God. When a poor sinner comes to him bankrupt, he says, "I forgive you freely: your offence is all gone. I do not want you to earn a pardon by your tears, and prayers, and anguish of soul. You have not to make me merciful, for I am merciful already; and my dear Son Jesus Christ has made such a propitiation that I can be just and yet can forgive you all this debt. Therefore, go in peace."

Furthermore, this debt was *fully* discharged. The creditor did not say, "Come, my good fellow, I will take fifty per cent. off the account if you find the remainder." As they had nothing wherewith to pay, they would not have been a bit the better if he had reduced them ninety per cent. If he had taken half the debt, the one would have owed two hundred and fifty and the other twenty-five; but still their case would have been hopeless, since they had not a farthing of their own. Now the Lord, when he blots out his people's sin, leaves no trace of it remaining. My own persuasion is that when our Lord Jesus died upon the cross he made an end of all the sins of all his people, and made full and effectual atonement for the whole of those who ever shall believe in him. I can sing with all my heart—

> "Here's pardon for transgressions past,
> It matters not how black their cast;
> And, O my soul, with wonder view,
> For sins to come here's pardon too!"

All the sin of believers has been once for all carried into the wilderness of oblivion by our great Scapegoat, and none shall ever find a sin wherewith to condemn one soul of the chosen band. There is no debt left against a believer: no, not one single pennyworth of debt remains upon the score. Does not the Spirit of God himself ask the question, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" The Lord has frankly forgiven their debt, and he has not done so in part, but as a whole. As for our sins, "the depths have covered them;" "there is not one of them left." Hallelujah!

Observe that it was a very *effectual* forgiveness too. The only person that can forgive a debt is he to whom the debt is due. God only can forgive sin, seeing it is a debt to him. What think you of those folk who are said to be able to forgive you for a shilling? Why, I say that to pay them their fee would be elevenpence three farthings and another farthing thrown away. When you have got their forgiveness

what is the good of it? Suppose I were to forgive you for injuries done by you to the Queen, of what value would my forgiveness be? He against whom I have transgressed is the only one that can pronounce my pardon; but if he absolves me, how effectual is the sentence! When the creditor said, "I freely forgive you both," why, the deed was done: his lips had power, he had finished the debt by his word. And so when the Lord Jesus Christ is looked unto by the eye of faith, there comes a voice from his dear wounds which cries to the poor trembling bankrupt sinner, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven. I have blotted out your sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud your iniquities." What an effectual pardon it is! How it charms the heart, and lulls every fear to rest! He frankly, he fully, he freely, he effectually forgave them both.

And I believe that when this is done, I may add another adjective—it is an *eternal* discharge. That creditor could never summon those debtors again for debts which he had remitted. He could never think of such a thing with any show of justice. He had frankly forgiven them, and they were forgiven. God does not play fast and loose with his creatures, and forgive them and then punish them. I never shall believe in God's loving a man to-day, and casting him away to-morrow. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance on his part. Justification is not an act which can be reversed, and followed with damnation. No; no; "whom he justified, them he also glorified."

"If sin be pardoned I'm secure,
Death has no sting beside;
The law gave sin its damning power,
But Christ my ransom died."

By his death our Redeemer effectually swept away sin once for all, and all the curse of the law he removed. In the offering of bullocks and lambs there was a continual remembrance made of sin, for the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin; but the apostle writes, "This Man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God," because his work was effectually and eternally done.

Only one more remark on this point: this frank forgiveness *applied to both the debtors*—"he frankly forgave them both." The man that owed only fifty pence needed a free discharge as truly as the debtor who owed five hundred; for though he was not so deep in the mire, yet he was as truly in the slough. If a man was lying in prison for debt, as men used to do under our old laws, if he only owed fifty pounds he was shut within walls just as closely as the greater debtor who owed fifty thousand; and he could no more get out without the payment or forgiveness of his smaller liability than the bigger debtor could. A bird held by a string is as much a prisoner as a bull that is tied by a rope. Now, you good people who have always tried to do your duty, and are numbered with the fifty pence debtors, you must confess that you have become somewhat indebted to God by committing a measure of sins. Take note that you cannot be saved except by the free forgiveness of God through the precious blood of Christ. The fifty pence debtor must obtain his discharge by grace alone. It is also a most blessed thing to perceive that he forgave the five hundred pence debtor with equal freeness. Perhaps I have

some here, men and women, who have never made any pretence of being good, who from their childhood have gone from bad to worse. There is a possibility of free and instantaneous forgiveness for you at this moment. You that are over head and ears in debt to God can be freely forgiven by the same Lord who forgives the smaller debtors. When a man has his pen in his hand, and is writing receipts, it takes him no more trouble to write a receipt for five hundred pounds than it does for a bill of fifty—the same signature will suffice: and when the Lord has the pen of his Spirit in his hand, and he is about to write upon a conscience the peace which comes of reconciliation, he can write upon one as well as upon another. Ho, you with a little bill, bring it here that infinite grace may write upon it "CANCELLED!" Ho, you with a more weighty account, come and place it near that gracious right hand, for though your bill be never so long and heavy, the hand of Infinite Love can write "CANCELLED" in a moment! My joy overflows at having such a gospel to preach to you: whatever your guilt, my gracious God is ready to forgive you for Jesus' sake, because he delighteth in mercy.

III. I now beg your very special attention to the last point, and that is THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THIS BANKRUPTCY AND THIS FREE DISCHARGE. It is said "*When* they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." There is a time when pardon comes, and that time is when self-sufficiency goes. If any person in this place has in his own conscience come to this point, that he feels he has nothing to pay, he has come to the point at which God is ready to forgive him. He that will own his debt, and confess his own incapacity to meet it, shall find that God frankly blots it out. The Lord will never forgive us until we are brought to the starvation of pride and the death of boasting. A sense of spiritual bankruptcy shows that a man has become *thoughtful;* and this is essential to salvation. How can we believe a thoughtless person to be a saved man? If we so think about our state as to mourn our sin and feel its wickedness, and if we have made a close search into our hearts and lives, and find that we have no merit and no might, then are we prepared in all thoughtfulness to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Must there not be serious thought before we can hope for mercy? Would you have God save us while we are asleep, while we are giddy, frivolous, trifling, and without concern about our sin? Surely that would be giving a premium to folly! God acts not so. He will have us know the seriousness of our danger, for else we shall treat the whole matter with lightness; and *we* shall miss the moral effect of pardon, while *he* will be robbed of his glory.

Next, when we come to feel our bankruptcy we then *make an honest confession*, and to that confession a promise is given—"he that confesseth his sin shall find mercy." The two debtors had owned to their debts, and they had also openly confessed, though it must have gone against the grain a bit, that they could not pay. They humbled themselves before their creditor, and then he said, "I frankly forgive you." If one of these debtors had bounced and bragged, "Oh, we can pay;" in all probability he would have been sent to prison. As for you, poor trembler, I do not know where you are this morning, but here is comfort for you: when you go unto God in your chamber and cry,

"Lord, have mercy upon me, for I am guilty, and I cannot justify myself before thee, nor offer any excuse to thee:" then it is that he will say, "Be of good cheer; I have put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." When you have nothing to pay and confess your insolvency, the debt shall be wiped out. When you are brought to your worst, you shall see the Lord at his best.

It is in their utter destitution that *men value a discharge.* If God were to give his mercy to every man at once, without his ever having had any sense of sin at all, why men would count it cheap and think nothing of it. "God is merciful," is a common saying everywhere; and it is such a bit of valueless talk with them, that they let it roll glibly out as if it were no matter. They do not worship him for his mercy or serve him for his grace. They say, "Oh, God is merciful," and then they go on to sin worse than ever; the idea has no effect upon their hearts or lives; they have no esteem for that mercy of which they speak so freely. So the Lord takes care that the sinner shall know his need of mercy by feeling the pinch of conscience and the terror of the law. If I may so speak, he puts in the sheriff's officer, and makes a distraint upon the soul by convincing the man of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The Lord puts an execution into the heart, and then it is, when the poor creature cries, "I have nothing to pay with," that free discharge is given by the Lord, and heartily prized by him to whom it comes. When our account is long and heavy, it is a blessed thing to see the Lord write "Cancelled," and to behold the whole mountain of debt swallowed up in the sea of love. Christ is precious when sin is bitter. Is it not wise on God's part that the cancelling of the debt shall come just when we have nothing to pay, and therefore are prepared to prize a free forgiveness?

Under conviction a poor soul *sees the reality of sin and of pardon.* My dear hearer, you will never believe in the reality of forgiveness till you have felt the reality of sin. I remember when I felt the burden of sin, and though but a child, my heart failed me for anguish, and I was brought very low. Sin was no bugbear to scare me; it was a grim reality; as a lion it tore me in pieces. And now, to-day, I know the reality of pardon: it is no fancy, no dream, for my inmost soul feels its power. I know that my sins are forgiven, and I rejoice therein; but I should never have known the real truth of this happy condition if I had not felt the oppressive load of sin upon the conscience. I could not afford to play at conversion, for sin was an awful fact in my soul. Our heavenly Father does not wish us to use lightness in a matter concerning which Jesus shed his blood, and so he brings us into trouble of soul, and afterwards into a vivid realization of free grace. He lets the whip fall on our shoulders until we bleed again, and this makes us weary of the slavery of sin. He sets conscience and the law upon us, and these two gaolers thrust us into the inner dungeon, and make our feet fast in the stocks. All this prepares us for the delivering power which shakes the prison walls, and looses our bonds, and for the tender love which washes our stripes and sets meat before us.

I do believe that the Lord will give us our quittance when we have got to our last farthing, and not till then, because *only then do we look to the Lord Jesus Christ.* Ah, my dear friends, as long as we

have anything else to look to, we never will look to Christ. That blessed port into which no ship did ever run in a storm without finding a sure haven is shunned by all your gallant vessels: they will rather put into any port along the coast of self-deceit than make for the harbour which is marked out by the two lighthouses of free-grace and dying love. As long as a man can scrape the meal-barrel and find a little in it, as long as he can hold up the oil-cruse, and it drips, if it only yields a drop in a week, he will never come to Christ for heavenly provision. As long as he has one rusty counterfeit farthing hidden away in the corner of his till, the sinner will never accept the riches of redeeming love; but when it is all up with him, when he has nothing in the parlour, nothing in the kitchen, nothing in the cellar, when there is neither stick nor stock left, then he prizes Jesus and his salvation. We break to make. We are emptied to be filled. When we cannot give, God can forgive. If any of you have any goodness of your own you will perish for ever. If you have anything you can trust to of your own you will be lost as sure as you are living men and women; but if you are reduced to sore extremity, and God's fierce wrath seems to burn against you, then not only may you have mercy, but mercy is yours already.

"'Tis perfect poverty alone
That sets the soul at large;
While we can call one mite our own
We get no full discharge.

But let our debts be what they may,
However great or small,
As soon as we have nought to pay
Our Lord forgives us all."

Blessed are ye poor, for ye shall be rich! Blessed are ye hungry, for ye shall be fed! Blessed are ye that are empty, for ye shall be filled! But woe unto you that are rich and are increased in goods, and have need of nothing, and boast of your own goodness! Christ has nothing to do with you, and we have nothing to preach to you except this—"They that be whole need not a physician." The heavenly Surgeon did not come to save those who have no need of saving. Let those who are sick prick up their ears and hear with delight, for the Physician is come with a special eye to them. Are you a sinner? Then Christ is the Saviour of sinners. Join hands with him by faith, and the work is done: you are saved for ever! God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Love's Competition

"Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged "—Luke vii. 42, 43.

I REMEMBER seeing, somewhere or other, as a sign upon an inn, the words "The First and Last." I do not know what that may happen to be among men, but I know that love is God's first and last. It is there that he begins with us in mercy—"We love him, because he first loved us." His love at the first springs up like a fountain in the midst of a desert, and freely flows along the wilderness to the unworthy sons of men. In the end, the result of that love is that men love him: they cannot help it any more than the rock can prevent the echo when the voice falls upon it. Love is not a creature of law: it comes not on demand, it must be free or not at all. It has its reasons why it springs up in our hearts; but it is not a mercenary thing which can be procured at such and such a price. It is not a matter of argument: it is not to itself an act performed as a matter of duty. Love is a duty certainly, but it does not come to us that way: it comes to us like a roe or a young hart, over every mountain and hill, leaping and bounding; it comes not as a heavy burden dragged along an iron way. If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

Men do not make themselves love by a course of calculation; but they are overtaken with it, and carried away by its power. When godly men consider and enjoy the great love of God to them, they begin to love God in return; just as the bud, when it feels the sunshine, opens to it of its own accord. Love to God is a sort of natural consequence which follows from a sight and sense of the love of God to us. I think it is Aristotle who says that it is impossible for a person to know that he is loved without feeling some degree of love in return. I do not know how that may be, for I am no philosopher; but I am sure that it is so with those who taste of the love of God. As love is

the first blessing coming from God to us, so it is the last return from us to God: he comes to us loving, we go home to him loving.

I. I intend to keep to my text, and handle it red hot, by first noticing that IT IS TAKEN FOR GRANTED THAT PARDONED SINNERS WILL LOVE. "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" It is implied that the two debtors who had been frankly forgiven would both love their benefactor. The question was not "Which of them will love him?" but "Which of them will love him *most?*" So, then, I say, it is taken for granted in the text that those who are pardoned will love him who has so freely pardoned them.

And this, first, because *it seems most natural that where kindness is received gratitude should be felt.* This is so generally admitted that gratitude is found among the lowest and worst of mankind. 'If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them." It is man-like to return good for good, and ingratitude is looked upon most rightly as one of the basest of the vices. Why, we find gratitude not only in men and women—intelligent creatures—but we find it in the very beasts of the field! "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." How a dog that has received benefits from you will be attached to you, and by every possible means will endeavour to show his affection! The ancients had many rare stories of the gratitude of wild beasts. You remember that of Androcles and the lion. The man was condemned to be torn to pieces by beasts; but a lion, to which he was cast, instead of devouring him, licked his feet, because at some former time Androcles had extracted a thorn from the grateful creature's foot. We have heard of an eagle that so loved a boy with whom he had played that, when the child was sick, the eagle sickened too; and when the child slept, this wild, strange bird of the air would sleep, but only then; for when the child awoke, the eagle awoke. When the child died, the bird died too. You remember that there is a picture in which Napoleon is represented as riding over the battle-field, and he stops his horse, as he sees a slain man with his favourite dog lying upon his bosom doing what he can to defend his poor dead master. Even the great man-slayer paused at such a sight. There is gratitude among the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the air. And, surely, if we receive favours from God, and do not feel love to him in return, we are worse than brute beasts; and so the Lord, in that pathetic verse in Isaiah, pleads against us, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." If we receive favours from God, it is but natural that we should love him in return. Alas, that many should be so unnatural, so false to every noble instinct, so dead to the gratitude which goodness deserves!

But gratitude should surely arise when the benefit is surpassingly great. When favours are far above the common run of blessings—when these favours are not such as are confined to time and to the body, but when they reach to eternity and bless the soul; when favours are of such weight as the forgiveness of sin, the salvation of the soul from wrath to come; surely here love must spring up with the greatest force and freedom. I would stand and sing to the fountain of the

heart as Israel did in the wilderness, "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The princes digged the well." And has not our great Prince, who has been smitten upon the cheek, digged this well by giving us, through his free grace and dying love, to taste of full remission and of complete pardon of our guilt? Shall we not, must we not, love the Redeemer in return? To have sin forgiven and not to love God! I call common ingratitude worse than brutish; but in this case where shall I go for a word? I must call it devilish. It were worse than infernal to receive a deliverance from guilt so great, and from punishment so justly terrible, and not to love the Lord, through whom it is given to us. Oh, love the Lord, whose mercy endureth for ever! If, indeed, you have tasted of that mercy, you must love him. It cannot be otherwise—you are bound to God by bonds of love, and these draw you, by a secret but irresistible force, to love the Lord in return.

And moreover, not only is this natural and necessary, because of the greatness of the mercy, but *the grace of God always takes care that wherever pardon is given love shall be ensured;* for the Holy Spirit co-operates with the work of Christ, and if we are cleansed from the stain of our former evil through the blood of Christ, we are renewed and changed in the spirit of our minds by the Holy Spirit. He does not take away our sin, and then leave us that old heart of stone, insensible, ungrateful; but as he gives us a garment of righteousness he gives us a heart of flesh. The Spirit works in us a degree of love at the same time that he creates the first look of faith. Anon our faith increases by which we received remission, and then he works in us more and more that love to Christ by which we cling to him. This love works in us hatred of sin and a spirit of obedience, whereby we yield ourselves up to the service of him who has bought us with his precious blood. You know that it is so, brethren. Where pardon comes, delight in God comes with it. You know that God does not divide his gifts, and give justification to one and sanctification to another; but the covenant is one, and the blessings of the covenant are threaded on the one string of infinite wisdom, so that when there comes the washing in the blood, there comes also a cleansing with water by the Word. The Holy Spirit washes us from the power of sin, as the blood of Christ cleanses us from the guilt of sin. Where sin is forgiven, there must be love to the God who forgave it, because the Spirit of God makes sure work upon the heart of the believer, and one of his first works is love.

I need not argue this further, because all Christians know this as a matter of fact—*where there is no love there is no pardon.* You cannot be pardoned, and not love God as a result of his loving forgiveness. What was the very first emotion that you and I felt when we had a sense of guilt removed? We felt joy for our own sake; but immediately after, or at the same instant, we felt such intense gratitude to God that we loved him beyond all expression. We have sometimes been half afraid that we do not love God so much now as we did at that moment, though I trust that the fear is groundless. But at that moment there was nothing too hot or too heavy for us to have attempted on behalf of him who had taken the burden from off our shoulder. We would

have said at that moment, "Here am I; send me," if it had been to prison, or to death. Oh, the joy of those first days! They are rightly called the days of our espousals. And what love we had then! We were willing to leave all for Christ's sake. We snapped fond connections at his command. Truly, like Israel of old, we would have gone after our God into the wilderness—ay, after our Saviour into the grave. Nothing could have kept us back, or have caused us to wander from him then. Do you not remember how you used to long for Sabbath-days, to hear of Jesus, and praise his name with his people? If there was a week-night service, you were always there, though no one persuaded you to go. Then, any corner in the meeting-house was good enough for you. Now, perhaps, you want a very soft cushion to sit upon. You sat then in a straight-backed pew, and did not know it. Now, you want very tender dealing; and the preacher must mind that he interests you by illustrations and poetical allusions; but then the gospel itself interested you; and however dull the preacher might have been, you were so willing to hear about Jesus, and to know of his love, that there you were, eager to hear the humblest evangelist. Wisdom did not need to press you into her house, for you were earnestly waiting at the posts of her doors, glad to hear even the footfalls of those who came in and out. Oh, those were brave days! I hope that we have braver days now; but, for certain, as sure as we knew our pardon, we felt that we loved the Lord with all our hearts.

Now I want to make a little practical use of this inference from the text. That pardoned souls love their pardoning God is a great truth, and a very solemn one in its bearings upon us at this time, for there are persons in this house of prayer who were never forgiven; and we are sure of that unhappy fact, since they do not love God. Their sins must be still upon them, because they have not the token of pardon, inasmuch as they have no love to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Oh, listen to me, ye that do not love God, and yet, perhaps, dream that you are saved! Are there not some here that seldom *think of* God, who do not care if a day, a week, a month, a year, should pass over their heads, and yet they have no thought of the Almighty Judge of all the earth? They receive his mercies; but they do not thank him. They feel his power; but they do not fear him. "God is not in all their thoughts." O my hearer, if this be your case, you do not love him; for if we love any person, we are sure to think of him. Thoughts fly that way in which the heart moves. I do not say that we are always thinking of those we love; but I do say that our thoughts will fly that way when they can. You know at sunset where the crows live. Perhaps all day long you are unable to tell; for they may fly from one ploughed field to another to find their meat. But watch when night comes on, and when they are free from other obligations, and wish to find rest; they fly straight to those tall trees whereon they have built their nests. A man may, in the busy time of the day, think about fifty things; but let him be free from pressing labour and care, and he returns to his love as birds fly to their nests at night. His thought flies to Jesus, because Jesus is the home of his heart. If your hearts love God, your thoughts will run to him as the rivers

run to the sea. Yea, and often in the very middle of business, the man who loves his God will be speaking with him. He may not interrupt the conversation, and those in the shop may not know what is on his mind; but his heart will be up above the mountains, where the angels dwell, communing with the great Father of lights. But where there is no thought of God, there is no love to him.

Are there not many who never *do* anything for God? He has made them, and he preserves them, and yet they never make him any return by way of willing action designed to give him pleasure. I may put it to some of you—did you ever do anything distinctly for God in all your lives? What! Not so much as once? Ah, me! a man so curiously made by the divine finger, displaying infinite skill in every blood-vessel, and nerve, and muscle, that are necessary for his life and motion, and yet he has never thought of the Great One who has set all this machinery in motion, and keeps it in action! To live only by God, and yet to live without him! Strange! Can there exist a man who never does anything for his God, who is constantly doing so much for him? If so, I would say to such a one—You have never been pardoned; for you do not love God, since you never think of him, and you do nothing for him.

Some men evidently do not love God, for they have *no care* about anything that concerns him. They do not refrain from sin because sin would grieve God. The idea of grieving God, perhaps, has not crossed their minds; so they vex the Holy Spirit most thoughtlessly. But, ah! if you love anyone, you will not like to cause him grief: you will not do the evil thing which he hates. He that loves God will often have a check put upon him, and feel that he cannot do this great wickedness, and sin against God. To sin against God is the greatest of sin, and the essence of sin. The venom of sin lies there. This makes sin so exceeding sinful, that it is against the God of love. But if you never felt that, then you do not love him; and, for certain, you are not forgiven.

Look at others: they do not love God, for they do *not care for his house* where his people meet. They seldom come to the meeting for worship; and if they come, it is from some other motive than to meet with God. They do not care for *his day*. Sundays are very dreary in London, so they say. There is nothing to interest them, for they have no interest in the great Father, or his incarnate Son; they have no care to hear of him, or to praise him, or to pray to him. They do not care for *his Book*, though it is a world of delights and comforts. The Bible is perfumed with the love of God, but they perceive not its fragrance. The Saviour's face is to be seen reflected in almost every page, and yet some think that the Bible is more dull than an old almanack; and, though they must keep it in their house—for it is respectable to have a copy of it—yet to read it, and to read it with pleasure—why, that has never happened to them; nor is there any likelihood that it ever will unless they get made anew.

Nor do they care for *God's people*. In fact, they like a quiet joke against Christian people; and sometimes, if they can see faults in them—and, oh, how readily they may!—they report those faults with considerable exaggerations, and feel pleased to eat up the faults

of God's people as they eat bread! Want of love to the children argues want of love to their Father. "He that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him;" and we know that we love God when we love his children. But if in your heart there is no such love to his children, to his Book, to his day, to his house, or to his service, you may rest quite certain, my friend, that your guilt clings to you still. You are unpardoned, and God will require that which is past, and call you to account. For every secret thing he will bring you into judgment, and for every idle word that you have spoken he will take reckoning of you. Ah! how sad it is that when I am longing to speak joyously about the love that arises out of pardoned sin, I am compelled, for pity's sake, to turn aside to give a warning to many who, having no love to God, prove by that fact that they have never been forgiven!

So I leave the first point. It is supposed in the text, and taken for granted, that all pardoned sinners will love him who has pardoned them.

II. But now, secondly, IT IS SUGGESTED IN THE TEXT, THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF DEGREE IN THE MATTER OF LOVE TO GOD. "Tell me which of them will love him *most*." These words evidently show that some persons love God more than others, and that, albeit there must be a sincere love to God in all pardoned sinners, yet there is not the same degree of love. Love is evidently a grace which is not stereotyped, and cast in a mould, so as to be the same in every case, and at every time. *Love is a thing of life: it is, therefore, a thing of growth.* It is certainly so in our own selves. There was a time when we did not love God so much as we do now; and I grieve to say that there are even now times when we do not love God so much as we once did, for we grow cold and backsliding. Love is not like a piece of cast iron, fixed and set; but it grows, and has its times of budding, flowering, and leaf-shedding. It is like a fire; at one time it may burn low, and at another time it may be blown up to a very vehement heat. Love rises and falls: I speak not of God's love to us; but of our love to God. It has its ups and downs, its summers and its winters, its flood-tides and its ebbs; and if we find a change in love, in the same heart, we are not at all astonished that it should differ in different hearts.

Besides, we know that there are differences in love, because *there are differences in all the other graces.* Faith—some men have much faith. God be thanked that there are men of strong faith still on the face of the earth! But there are others who have a faith which, though a true faith, is a very weak one. It is a trembling faith. It cannot walk the waves with Peter, but it can sink with him, and it can cry out for deliverance. Faith, in some Christians, seems to be a very feeble affair. As I said the other day, they hardly know whether it is faith or unbelief. Their cry is, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," as if they had made a mistake in calling it faith at all, for it was so mixed with unbelief. It is not always such an infant grace, for there are strong believers, who have turned to flight the armies of the aliens—men who have borne their cross without impatience, and their testimony without cowardice; men who have conquered sin, and lived

in holiness, and brought glory to God. Faith, like a ladder, has its lower and its higher rounds. Faith has its dawning, its noon, its shade. We are sure that it is so, for we have observed it in ourselves, and seen it in others. We have seen it great, and we have seen it little.

The practical point I would reach is just this. *Let us look, first of all, to our love in its sincerity.* What if my love may not be compared with yours as to degree? Yet the Lord grant that I may truly love him. Peter could not say that he loved Christ more than others, but he did say, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." A little pearl is a pearl as much as a great one, though every one of us would sooner have the greater pearl. There is the Queen's image on a fourpenny piece as certainly as there is upon the sovereign: though we would all prefer the golden coin. There is the image of God on all his people's faith and love, whether great or little. The main thing with the coin is to be sure that it is genuine metal. So, if love be real love, that is the main point. Do you love the Lord with all your heart? If so, strive to have more love, but do not fling away what you have, for you would thus despise what the Spirit of God has wrought in you.

Endeavour also, dear friends, to have growing love. Do not be satisfied to be to-day what you were twelve months ago. I am afraid that some Christians do not grow much. I am very glad when I see them grow downward, when they are rooted in humility, when they have truer views of themselves than they ever yet had, and a deeper sense of their indebtedness to God. That is good growth. Try to have, however, a love that grows, so that you may more forcibly love Jesus Christ than you did in days that are past. Do say to yourself, "Well, if I have ever so little love, it shall be practical love, I will show it. I will be doing something for my Lord." The woman, by whose means this parable was called forth, loved Christ so that she brought her alabaster box of ointment, and anointed his feet, and washed them with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. And one of the best ways to make love grow is to use all the love you have. Is it not so with merchants and their money? If they want to increase their capital, they trade with it. If you want to increase your love to Jesus, use it. Do not merely talk about it, but actually serve him under its sweet constraint. It is a very poor Christianity that consists in sitting still and dreaming, and never attempting any practical service for Jesus, our Lord. He that thinks that he will quietly enjoy religion all alone, will soon find that he has very little of it to enjoy; for doubts and fears will breed in swarms in a stagnant atmosphere. Where there is none of the blessed wind of activity, there will soon be mists and damps—perhaps foul gas and fevers.

And if you have but little love at present, *cry to God to give you an intenser love;* and, though I have said that to use your love is a good way to increase it, yet there is something still better, and that is, to know more, and feel more of the love of Christ to you. If you take exercise, you will increase your sense of warmth; but it will be a far surer thing if you get where the sun shines with equatorial heat: so other means are good, but to get near to Jesus is best of all. In proportion as you live close to the glorious central sun of the love of

Christ, you will yourself be warm. I was about to compare the heart of my Lord to a volcanic mountain constantly streaming with the burning lava of love. Oh, that my soul could but get that fire-stream poured into it to set the whole of my nature on fire, and consume me in the flame-torrent of love!

You see that it is suggested in the text that there are differences in the degrees of love; and there let us leave it, for we must come to the third point.

III. Thirdly, THE TEXT PUTS TO US A QUESTION, "WHO WILL LOVE HIM MOST?"

I want to introduce the question to you by saying that it is *a very interesting one*. After what the Lord has done for us, one takes pleasure in thinking what will come of it. One likes to think of the farmer's harvest. After all that ploughing and sowing, what will come of it? It is interesting to begin to calculate the crop, and to anticipate the shouts of harvest-home. Now, what will come of infinite love, the supreme act of God's heart to men? What will come out of the gift of his Only-begotten Son, and the putting away of sin through the death of Jesus? What will men do for God after this? How much will they love him? It is an interesting question. What have you to say upon it?

And it is *a personal question*, which the Lord puts to each one of us. You know he put it to Simon. "Tell me," said he, "which of them will love him most?" And he puts it to us to consider it, to turn it over, and to give our own verdict; because there may be some blunder in our heart which this question is meant to set right; and the thoughts which the enquiry will cause in the spirit are meant to correct our judgments. Therefore do not put it aside, but try now to answer it as the Lord puts it.

It is *a practical question*—"Which of them will love him most?"—for everything in conduct depends upon love. Where there is much love, there is sure to be much service in proportion to the strength. Give us a church that loves Christ Jesus much. You will have mighty prayer-meetings; you will have a holy membership; you will have liberal giving to the cause of Christ; you will have hearty praising of his name; you will have careful walking before the world; you will have earnest endeavours for the conversion of sinners. Missions at home and abroad will be set on foot when love is fervent. When the heart is right, everything is likely to be right; but when the heart goes wrong, oh, what a fatal thing it is! A disease of the heart is looked upon as the worst of mischiefs that can happen to a man. One old doctor of my acquaintance used to say, "We can do nothing with the heart." God keep us from a diseased heart: a fatty degeneration of the heart, or an ossification of the heart towards the Lord Jesus Christ!

The question asked in the text is, however, *a somewhat limited one*. It is this. The question is not, who in all the world will love Christ most?—but who out of two persons, in whom there is no particular difference of character, but only this one difference—that the one owes five hundred pence, and the other fifty—which out of these two will love Christ most? We will suppose that they are equally tender of

heart, and equally regenerate; and that they do know, each of them, certainly, that his debt has been discharged. The only difference between them is that one has been a grosser sinner than the other; and the question asked is, "Which of those two will love the Saviour most?"

It is *a very simple question*, too, not at all hard to answer; for even this Simon, the Pharisee, who, like the rest of the Pharisees, was very badly instructed, yet, nevertheless, could see his way to answer the question correctly. So he answered, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most;" and the Lord replied, "Thou hast rightly judged." Thus I have set before you the question.

IV. And so, lastly, IT IS EXPECTED THAT WE GIVE A REPLY; and I do wish for myself—and therefore wish the same for you—that each one of us may say, "I am the man that ought to love the Lord Jesus most; and by his grace I will surely do so."

The most indebted should love most. Have we not here many five-hundred-pence debtors? Some of my dear brethren here present were among outward sinners the very chief—men who could drink, and swear, and lie, ringleaders in everything that was evil. Blessed be God that such have been here led to Jesus! We heard the other night a dear brother tell us of what he used to be. With modesty and shamefacedness he mentioned how great his sin had been; but his sin was put away; he was pardoned, and he knew it, and rejoiced in it. Such a man must say, "I will love him most." Where there has been overt sin, palpable, undeniable—where the outward character has been defiled and stained with it, forgiveness involves us in deep obligation to grateful love. You may stand in the front rank, and love Jesus most.

But I am not going to let you rise to that eminence of obligation, or rather sink to that depth of indebtedness without having a struggle for it myself. Some of us take that place of eminent obligation on another ground, and yet it is the same ground; for while some of us never were openly profane, or drunken, or immoral, we have to confess the equal greatness of our sin on account of our offending against light and knowledge, against early convictions, against a holy training, against a tender conscience, against singular favours received from God; and therefore with shame we begin to take the lowest room, acknowledging that to us belongs the greatest debt of grateful praise to God. When I was preaching once I said—and I meant it—that I should be the deepest debtor to divine grace that ever entered the gates of glory, and I ventured to say—

> "Then loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
> While heaven's resounding mansions ring,
> With shouts of sovereign grace."

It was in a country place, and as I came down the pulpit stairs many clustered about me to shake hands, and one old lady said to me, "You made one great blunder in your sermon." I said, "My dear soul, I dare say I made a score. I am a great blunderer." "No," said she, "but you said that you would sing the loudest when you get to heaven; but you shall not, for I owe more to divine grace than

you possibly can do. I was once a great sinner, and I have had much forgiven, and therefore I shall praise God more than you." I did not yield the point, but I held my tongue. I could let her be first, and yet take the same place myself. As I went down the aisle many friends declared that they would not give way to me in that point, and that they ought to praise God more than I, for they owed him more. It was a happy controversy. It reminded me of Ralph Erskine's Contention among the Birds of Paradise, where he represents the saints in glory, each saying that he shall lie the lowest, and shall praise the most sweetly the infinite love of God. I think that there are grounds upon which some here, who have been kept from everything which is outwardly evil, may, nevertheless, feel that inwardly they are five hundred pence debtors; and so, when the question is asked, "Which will love him most?" they will say, "Why, I! I was not so honest as some of those wicked fellows, I did not dare to say all they said, nor to be openly vile as they were; but I was quite as bad at heart, and if I dare have had my full swing, I should have been as base as they were."

But I do not think that the spirit of the parable is exhausted by either of these cases. I think it includes more. There are some who evidently have not had more forgiven than others as to outward sin; on the contrary, they have been prudently brought up from their childhood, and yet for many a year they have been foremost in service, and have been special lovers of the Lord. Though by no means great offenders in their unconverted state, they are certainly great saints now; intense in their service, consistent in their character, fervent in their love. How is it that some who shout that they have been snatched from the burning, and according to their own statement were the very chief of sinners, and make a great trumpet-blowing over their own conversion, yet do not love the Lord Jesus one half so much as these dear, quiet souls who never went into open sin? I take it, the reason is this. Our estimate of sin is, after all, the thing which will create and inflame our love; for if a man thinks sin to be exceeding sinful, and feels it to be so, he *has a deeper sense of his indebtedness* than the man who may have committed grosser vices, but has never seen them in their real blackness, as they appear in the light of God's countenance. Too many believers know little of what it is to be amazed and astounded at the heinousness of their transgressions. Why, time was with me —and is now—when, if I had inadvertently spoken a word that was not exactly true, it cost me more pain to think of what was only a hasty error than it has cost many men to repent of their cursing and swearing. I am sorry to say it, but I believe that some make a glory of their shame, and dare to brag of what they used to be. They stand up and make confession without a tear in their eye, or a blush on their cheek. Such testimony ought never to be heard, for it is a positive creator of evil in the minds of those that hear it. I am sorry to have to say it; but I know that it is so. Testimonies are published which are provocatives to vice, and rather tend to make men immoral than to make them turn to God. In certain circles he is treated as a hero who can prove that he has been a great rascal. It was not thus that

the prodigal was received by his father: he never hung up his old rags as a trophy. O brethren, when we talk about what we were, we had better veil our faces. Our former follies are things to be confessed to God in secret; and if they must be spoken in public, to the praise of divine grace, there must be a careful avoidance of anything like boasting, for it is a shame even to speak of the things that were done of them in secret. When there is really a deep sense of sin, there is a holy, delicate way of speaking of it. Old sins are not to be talked of as an old soldier shoulders his crutch, and shows how fields were won. A crimson blush is the best colour to wear when we speak of our lost estate. To talk smilingly of injuries done to the delicacy of our own conscience, of awful injuries done to others by a foul example, is not to glorify God, but to enthrone vice.

And, dear friends, I believe that some, whom God has preserved by preventing grace from going into great sin, will, nevertheless, love him most because *they have a clearer view than others of what it cost in order that they might be pardoned.* Happy are they who remember well the griefs of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane

> "There's ne'er a gift his hand bestows
> But cost his heart a groan."

Oh, if your heart dwells on Calvary, where falls the crimson shower of Christ's most precious blood—if you gaze intently upon the wounds of Jesus till you die into the death of the Crucified, then do you love much. It is well to have the soul torn with anguish because

> "It cost HIM cries and tears
> To bring us near to God:
> Great was our debt, and he appears
> To make the payment good."

For, in proportion as you estimate the sacrifice, you will love him whose own self was the sacrifice for sin. Brethren, I hope you all love Christ Jesus more than I do; for I would have him possess the highest love of every human heart: and yet I will not be willingly excelled by any one of you in a competition of love to Jesus. I will run my very best that no man take my crown.

But supposing, dear friends, any of you do love him most, then *show it,* just as that woman did who brought the alabaster box of precious ointment. If you love him most, *do most.* Do everything that is possible to humanity, quickened by the Spirit of God. If you have done much, do ten times more. Never talk of what you have done, but go on to something else. An officer rode up to his general, and said, "Sir, we have taken two guns from the enemy." "It is well," said the general, "Take two more."

If you have most love to Christ, do most spiritual good to men. Yet *do somewhat distinctly for Jesus.* It is a blessed token for good when our work among men is not so much for the sake of sinners as for love of Jesus. When we love the brethren, it should be because they belong to Christ. It is sweet to serve the Lord Christ himself. See how the holy woman offered homage distinctly to her Lord: tears

for his travel-stains, hair to wipe his feet, ointment to anoint his flesh. Do your choicest and best for Jesus, for Jesus personally.

Try to do it most humbly. Stand behind him. Do not ask anybody to look at you. Do it very quietly. Do it, feeling that it is a great honour to be permitted to do the least service for Jesus. Do not dream of saying, "I am somebody. I am doing great things. I do more even than Simon, the Pharisee. Come see my zeal for the Lord of hosts." Jehu talked in that fashion; but he was good for nothing. Do your personal part without seeking to be seen of men.

Do it self-sacrificingly. Bring your best ointment. Pinch yourself for Christ. Make sacrifices—go without this and that to have something wherewith you can do him honour.

Do it very penitently. When you serve him best, still let the tears fall on his feet, mingling with the costly ointment. The tears and the ointment go well together. Mourn your guilt, while you rejoice in his grace.

Do it continuously. "This woman," said Christ, "since I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet." Do not leave off loving him and serving him. Do it on, and on, and on, however much the flesh may ask for respite from service.

Do it enthusiastically. See how she kissed his feet; nothing less than this would express her love. Stoop down, and kiss and kiss again those blessed feet which travelled so far in love for you. Throw your whole soul into your deed of love. "Why," they will say, "Mrs. So-and-so is enthusiastic. She is quite carried away by her zeal." Let it be true, more and more. Never mind what the cold-hearted think, for they cannot understand you. They will say, "Ah! that young person is too fast by half." Never mind. Be faster still. Wise people cry out, "He has too many irons in the fire." But I say to you, blow up the fire; get all the irons red hot; and hammer away with all your might. With all your strength and energy plunge into the service of your Master. If you love your Master, you can best show your love by ardent service. The Lord bless you with the utmost degree of love, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

The Good Samaritan

"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise"—Luke x. 25—37.

OUR text is the whole story of the Samaritan; but as that is very long, suppose, for our memories' sake, we consider the exhortation in the thirty-seventh verse to be our text. "*Go, and do thou likewise.*"

There are certain persons in the world who will not allow the preacher to speak upon anything but those doctrinal statements concerning the way of salvation which are known as "the gospel." If the preacher shall insist upon some virtue or practical grace they straightway say that he was not preaching the gospel, that he became legal, and was a mere moral teacher. We do not stand in any awe of such criticism, for we clearly perceive that our Lord Jesus Christ himself would very frequently have come under it. Read the Sermon on the Mount and

judge whether certain people would be content to hear the like of it preached to them on the Sabbath. They would condemn it as containing very little gospel and too much about good works. Our Lord was a great practical preacher. He frequently delivered addresses in which he made answer to questioners, or gave direction to seekers, or upbraided offenders, and he gave a prominence to practical truth such as some of his ministers dare not imitate. Jesus tells us over and over again the manner in which we are to live towards our fellow-men, and he lays great stress upon the love which should shine throughout the Christian character. The story of the good Samaritan, which is now before us, is a case in point, for our Lord is there explaining a point which arose out of the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The question is legal, and the answer is to the point. But let it never be forgotten that what the law demands of us the gospel really produces in us. The law tells us what we ought to be, and it is one object of the gospel to raise us to that condition. Hence our Saviour's teaching, though it be eminently practical, is always evangelical: even in expounding the law he has always a gospel design. Two ends are served by his setting up a high standard of duty: on the one he slays the self-righteousness which claims to have kept the law by making men feel the impossibility of salvation by their own works; and, on the other hand, he calls believers away from all content with the mere decencies of life and the routine of outward religion, and stimulates them to seek after the highest degree of holiness—indeed, after that excellence of character which only his grace can give. This morning I trust that though I keep very much to practical points I shall be guided by the Spirit of holiness, and shall not really be guilty of legality, nor will any of you be led into it. I shall not hold up the love of our neighbour as a condition of salvation, but as a fruit of it. I shall not speak of obedience to the law as the road to heaven, but I shall show you the pathway which is to be followed by the faith which works by love.

Let us proceed to the parable at once.

I. Our first observation will be that THE WORLD IS VERY FULL OF AFFLICTION. This story is but one among a thousand based upon an unhappy occurrence. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves." He went upon a short journey, and almost lost his life on the road. We are never secure from trouble; it meets us around the family hearth, and causes us to suffer in our own persons or in those of the dearest relatives; it walks into our shops and counting-houses, and tries us; and when we leave home it becomes our fellow-traveller, and communes with us on the road. "Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

Frequently the greater afflictions *are not occasioned by the fault of the sufferer*. Nobody could blame the poor Jew that when he was going down to Jericho about his business the thieves beset him, and demanded his money, and that when he made some little resistance they wounded him, stripped him, and left him half dead. How could he be blamed? It was to him a pure misfortune. Believe me, there is a great deal of sorrow in the world which does not arise out of the vice or folly of the persons enduring it: it comes from the hand of God upon the sufferer,

not because he is a sinner above others, but for wise ends unknown to us. Now, this is the kind of distress which above all others demands Christian sympathy, and the very kind which abounds in our hospitals. The man is not to blame for lying there beaten and bruised: those gaping wounds from which his life is oozing are not of his own inflicting, nor received in a drunken brawl or through attempting a foolhardy feat; he suffers from no fault of his own, and therefore he has a pressing claim upon the benevolence of his fellow men.

Still, *very much distress is caused by the wickedness of others.* The poor Jew on the road to Jericho was the victim of the thieves who wounded him and left him half dead. Man is man's worst enemy. If man were but tamed to peace the wildest beast in the world would be subdued; and if evil were purged from men's hearts, the major part of the ills of life would cease at once. The drunkard's wastefulness and brutality, the proud man's scorn, the oppressor's cruelty, the slanderer's lie, the trickster's cheat, the heartless man's grinding of the faces of the poor,—these put together are the roots of almost all the poisonous weeds which multiply upon the face of the earth to our shame and sorrow. If dominant sins could be taken away, as blessed be God they shall when Christ has triumphed through the world, much of human sorrow would be assuaged. When we see innocent persons suffering as the result of the sin of others our pity should be excited. How many there are of little children starving, and pining into chronic disease through a father's drunkenness, which keeps the table bare! Wives, too, who work hard themselves are brought down to pining sickness and painful disease by the laziness and cruelty of those who should have cherished them. Work-people, too, are often sorely oppressed in their wages, and have to work themselves to death's door to earn a pittance. Those are the people who ought to have our sympathy when accident or disease bring them to the hospital gates "wounded and half dead."

The man in the parable was quite helpless, he could do nothing for himself; there he must lie and die, those huge wounds must bleed his very soul away unless a generous hand shall interfere. It is as much as he can do to groan; he cannot even dress his wounds, much less arise and seek a shelter. He is bleeding to death among the pitiless rocks of the descent to Jericho, and he must leave his body to be fed upon by kites and crows unless some friend shall come to his help. Now, when a man can help himself, and does not, he deserves to suffer; when a man flings away opportunities by his idleness or self-indulgence a measure of suffering ought to be permitted to him as a cure for his vices; but when persons are sick or injured, and are unable to pay for the aid of the nurse and the physician, then is the time when true-hearted philanthropy should promptly step in and do its best. So our Saviour teaches us here.

Certain paths of life are peculiarly subject to affliction. The way which led from Jerusalem to Jericho was always infested by robbers. Jerome tells us that it was called the "bloody way," on account of the frequent highway robberies and murders which were there committed; and it is not so long ago as to be beyond the memory of man that an English traveller met his death on that road, while even very recent

travellers tell us that they have been either threatened or actually attacked in that particularly gloomy region, the desert which goes down to the city of palm trees. So also in the world around us there are paths of life which are highly dangerous and fearfully haunted by disease and accident. Years ago there were many trades in which from want of precaution death slew its thousands. I thank God that sanitary and precautionary laws are better regarded, and men's lives are thought to be somewhat more precious. Yet still there are ways of life which may each be called "the bloody way": pursuits which are necessary to the community, but highly dangerous to those who follow them. Our mines, our railways, and our seas show a terrible roll of suffering and death. Long hours in ill-ventilated work-rooms are accountable for thousands of lives, and so are stinted wages, which prevent a sufficiency of food from being procured. Many a needlewoman's way of life is truly a path of blood. When I think of the multitudes of our working people in this city who have to live in close, unhealthy rooms, crowded together in lanes and courts where the air is stagnant, I do not hesitate to say that much of the road which has to be trodden by the poor of London is as much deserving of the name of the way of blood as the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. If they do not lose their money it is because they never have it: if they do not fall among thieves, they fall among diseases which practically wound them, and leave them half dead. Now, if you have not to engage in such avocations, if your pathway does not lead you from Jerusalem to Jericho, but takes you, perhaps, full often from Jerusalem to Bethany, where you can enjoy the sweetnesses of domestic love and the delights of Christian fellowship, you ought to be very thankful, and be all the more ready to assist those who for your sakes, or for the benefit of society at large, have to follow the more dangerous roads of life. Do you not agree with me that such persons ought to be among the first to receive of our Christian kindness? Such abound in our hospitals and elsewhere.

Let that stand: it is clear that there is a great deal of affliction in the world, and much of it is of the sort which deserves to be succoured at once.

II. Secondly, THERE ARE MANY WHO NEVER RELIEVE AFFLICTION. Our Saviour tells us of two at least who "passed by on the other side," and I suppose he might have prolonged the parable so as to have mentioned two dozen if he had chosen to do so, and even then he might have been content to mention but one good Samaritan, for I hardly think that there is one good Samaritan to two heartless persons. I wish there were, but I fear the good Samaritans are very few in proportion to the number who act the part of the priest and the Levite.

Now, notice who the persons were that refused to render aid to the man in distress.

First, they were *brought to the spot by God's providence on purpose to do so.* What better thing could the Lord himself do for the poor man half dead than to bring some man to help him? An angel could not well have met the case. How should an angel, never wounded, understand binding up wounds and pouring in wine and oil. No, a man was wanted who would know what was necessary, who would with brotherly sympathy cheer the mind while doctoring the body. In our English

version we read, "*By chance* there came down a certain priest that way;" but learned Greek scholars read it, "*By a coincidence.*" It was in the order of divine providence that a priest should come first to this afflicted person, that so he might go and examine the case as a man of education and skill, and then when the Levite came afterwards he would be able to carry on what the priest began; and if one could not carry the poor man, the two might between them be able to bear him to the inn, or one might remain to guard him while the other ran for help. God brought them to this position, but they wilfully refused the sacred duty which providence and humanity demanded of them. Now, you that are wealthy are sent into our city on purpose that you may have compassion upon the sick, the wounded, the poor, and the needy. God's intent in endowing any person with more substance than he needs is that he may have the pleasurable office, or rather let me say, the delightful privilege, of relieving want and woe. Alas, how many there are who consider that store which God has put into their hands on purpose for the poor and needy to be only so much provision for their excessive luxury, a luxury which pampers them but yields them neither benefit nor pleasure. Others dream that wealth is given them that they may keep it under lock and key, cankering and corroding, breeding covetousness and care. Who dares roll a stone over the well's mouth when thirst is raging all around? Who dares keep the bread from the women and the children who are ready to gnaw their own arms for hunger? Above all, who dares allow the sufferer to writhe in agony uncared for, and the sick to pine into their graves unnursed? This is no small sin: it is a crime to be answered for to the Judge when he shall come to judge the quick and dead. Those people who neglected the poor man were brought there on purpose to relieve him, even as you are, and yet they passed by on the other side.

They were both of them persons, too, who ought to have relieved him, because *they were very familiar with things which should have softened their hearts.* If I understand the passage, the priest was coming down from Jerusalem. I have often wondered which way he was going, whether he was going up to the temple, and was in a hurry to be in time for fear of keeping the congregation waiting, or whether he had fulfilled his duty, and had finished his month's course at the temple and was going home. I conclude that he was going from Jerusalem to Jericho, because it says, "By chance there came *down* a certain priest that way." Now to the metropolis it is always "going up": going *up* to London, or *up* to Jerusalem; and as this priest was coming *down*, he was going to Jericho. It was quite literally going down, for Jericho lies very low. I conclude that he was going home to Jericho, after having fulfilled his month's engagements in the temple, where he had been familiar with the worship of the Most High, as near to God as man could be, serving amidst sacrifices and holy psalms and solemn prayers, and yet he had not learned how to make a sacrifice himself. He had heard those prophetic words which say, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," but he was entirely forgetful of such teaching: he had often read that law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," but he regarded it not. The Levite had not been quite so closely engaged in the sanctuary as the priest, but he had taken his share in holy work,

and yet he came away from it with a hard heart. This is a sad fact. They had been near to God, but were not like him. Dear people, you may spend Sabbath after Sabbath in the worship of God, or what you think to be so, and you may behold Christ Jesus set forth visibly crucified among you, and themes which ought to turn a heart of stone to flesh may pass before your minds, and nevertheless you may return into the world to be as miserly as ever, and to have as little feeling towards your fellow men as before. It ought not to be so. I beseech you suffer it not to be so in any case again.

These two persons, moreover, were *bound by their profession to have helped this man,* for though it was originally said of the high priest yet I think it could be said of any priest that he was taken from among men, that he might have compassion. If anywhere there should be compassion towards men, it should be in the heart of the priest who is chosen to speak for God to men and for men to God. No stone should ever be found in his bosom; he should be gentle, generous-hearted kindly, full of sympathy and tenderness; but this priest was not so, nor was the Levite who ought to have followed in his wake. And oh, you Christian ministers, and all of you who teach in schools, or who undertake any service of Christian ministry—and you ought all to do so, for the Lord hath made all his people to be priests unto him—there ought to be in you from your very profession a readiness of heart towards the kindliest actions for those who need them.

And there is one thing to be mentioned also against this priest and Levite, that *they were very well aware of the man's condition.* They came close to him and saw his state. It is a narrow trackway down to Jericho, and they were obliged to go almost over his wounded body: the first comer looked at him, but he hurried on; the second appears to have made a further investigation, to have had sufficient curiosity, at any rate, to begin to examine the state of the case; but his curiosity being satisfied his compassion was not aroused, and he hurried away. Half the neglect of the sick poor arises from not knowing that there are such cases, but many remain wilfully in ignorance, and such ignorance is no available excuse. In the case of the hospitals for which we plead to-day, you do know that there are persons in them at this moment suffering, persons suffering grieviously, for no fault of their own, and you know that these need your aid. As I rode the other evening by that noble building on our side of the water, St. Thomas's Hospital, I could not help meditating upon what a mass of pain and suffering was gathered within those walls; but then I thanked God that it was within those walls where succour would be most surely rendered to it to the best of human ability. So you do know that there is poverty and sickness around you, and if you pass by on the other side you will have looked at it, you will have known about it, and on your heads will be the criminality of having left the wounded man unhelped.

Yet the pair had capital excuses: both the priest and the Levite had excellent reasons for neglecting the bleeding man. I never knew a man refuse to help the poor who failed to give at least one admirable excuse. I believe that there is no man on earth who wickedly rejects the plea of need who is not furnished with arguments that he is right: arguments eminently satisfactory to himself, and such as he thinks

should silence those who press the case. For instance, the priest and Levite were both in a hurry. The priest had been a month away at Jerusalem from his wife and dear children, and he naturally wanted to get home; if he lingered the sun might be down; it was an awkward place to be in after sundown, and you could not expect him to be so imprudent as to stay in a lone place with darkness coming on. He had spent a very laborious month in the temple, you do not know how exhausting he had found it to act as a priest for a whole month, and if you did you would not blame him for wanting to get home to enjoy a little rest. Besides, he had promised to be home at a certain hour, and he was a man of punctuality, and would by no means cause anxiety to his wife and children, who would be looking from the housetop for him. A very excellent excuse was this: but he also felt that he really could not do much good. He did not understand surgery, and could not bind up a wound to save his life; he shrank from it; the very sight of blood turned his stomach, he could not bring himself to go near a person who was so frightfully mangled. If he did try to bind up a wound he felt he should be sure to make a muddle of it. If his wife had been with him, she could have done it; or if he had brought some plaister, liniment, or strapping, he would have tried his best, but as it was he could do nothing. The poor man, moreover, was evidently half dead, and would be quite dead in an hour or two, and therefore it was a pity to waste time on a hopeless case. Then the priest was only one person, and could not be expected to carry a bleeding man, and yet it would be idle to begin with the case and leave him there all night. True, he could almost hear the sound of the Levite's feet, indeed he hoped he was coming up behind, for he felt very nervous at being alone with such a case; but then that was all the more reason for leaving the matter, since the Levite would be sure to attend to it. Better still was the following line of excuse—you would not have a person stop in a place where another man had been half killed by thieves. The thieves might be back again, they were scarcely yet out of hearing even then, and a priest after a month's service ought to have some fees in his purse, and it was important not to run the risk of losing the support of his family by stopping in a place which was evidently swarming with highwaymen. He might be wounded too, and then there would be two people half dead, and one of them a valuable clergyman. Really, philanthropy would suggest that you take care of yourself, as you could not possibly do any good to the poor man. And then the man might die, and the person found near the body might be charged with the murder. It is always awkward to be found alone in a dark spot with the corpse of one who has evidently suffered from foul play. The priest might be taken up upon suspicion, and did not all the principles of prudence suggest that the very best thing that he could do was to get out of the way as quickly as possible? Moreover, he could pray for the man, you know, and he was glad to find that he had a tract with him which he would leave near him, and what with the tract and the prayer what more could a good man be expected to do? With this pious reflection he hastened on his way. It is just possible also that he did not wish to be defiled. A priest was too holy a person to meddle with wounds and bruises. Who would propose such a thing? He had come from Jerusalem in all the

odour of sanctity; he felt himself to be as holy as he could conveniently be, and therefore he would not expose such rare excellence to worldly influences by touching a sinner. All these powerful reasons put together made him content to save trouble, and leave the doing of kindness to others.

Now, this morning, I shall leave you to make all the excuses you like about not helping the poor and aiding the hospitals, and when you have made them they will be as good as those which I have set before you. You have smiled over what the priest might have said, but if you make any excuses for yourselves whenever real need comes before you, and you are able to relieve it, you need not smile over your excuses, the devil will do that; you had better cry over them, for there is the gravest reason for lamenting that your heart is hard toward your fellow-creatures when they are sick, and perhaps sick unto death.

III. In the third place THE SAMARITAN IS A MODEL FOR THOSE WHO DO HELP THE AFFLICTED. He is a model, first, if we notice *who the person was that he helped.* The parable does not *say* so, but it implies that the wounded man was a Jew, and, therefore, the Samaritan was not of the same faith and order. The apostle says, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This man was not of the household of faith, as far as the Samaritan's judgment went, but he was one of the "all men." The Jew and he were as much apart in religious sympathy as they well could be. Ay, but he was a man: whether he was a Jew or not, he was a man, a wounded, bleeding, dying man, and the Samaritan was another man, and so one man felt for another man and came to his aid. Do not ask whether a sick man believes in the thirty-nine articles, or the Westminster Assembly's catechism. Let us hope that he is sound in the faith, but if he is not his wounds need staunching just as much as if he held a perfect creed. You need not enquire whether he is a sound Calvinist, for an Arminian smarts when he is wounded; a Churchman feels as much pain as a Dissenter when his leg is broken, and an infidel needs nursing when he is crushed in an accident. It is as bad for a man to die with a heterodox creed as with the orthodox faith; indeed, in some respects it is far worse, and therefore we should be doubly anxious for his cure. We are to relieve real distress irrespective of creed, as the Samaritan did.

Moreover, the Jews were great haters of the Samaritans, and no doubt this Samaritan might have thought, "If I were in that man's case he would not help me. He would pass me by and say, 'It is a Samaritan dog, let him be accursed.'" The Jews were accustomed to curse the Samaritans, but it did not occur to the good man to remember what the Jew would have said: he saw him bleeding and he bound up his wounds. Our Saviour has not given us for a golden rule, "Do ye to others as others would do to you," but "as ye would they should do to you." The Samaritan went by that rule, and though he knew of the enmity in the Jewish mind he felt that he must heap coals of fire upon the wounded man by loving help; therefore he went straight away to his relief. Perhaps at another time the Jew would have put off the Samaritan and refused even to be touched by him; but the tender-hearted sympathizer does not think of that: the poor man is too sick to hold any crotchets

or prejudices, and when the Samaritan bends over him and pours in the oil and wine he wins a grateful glance from the son of Abraham.

That poor, wounded man was one who *could not repay him.* He had been stripped of all that he had, even his garments were taken from him; but charity does not look for payment, else were it no charity at all. The man was *a total stranger* too. The Samaritan had not even seen him before. What did that matter? He was a man, and all men are akin. "God hath made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth": the Samaritan felt that touch of nature which makes all men kin, and he bent over the stranger and relieved his pains.

He might have said, "Why should *I* help? He has been *rejected by his own people;* the priest and the Levite have left him; his first claim is upon his own countrymen." So have I known some say, "These persons have no claim; they ought to go to their own people." Well, suppose they have gone and failed, now comes your turn; and what the Jew would not do for the Jew let the Samaritan do, and he shall be blessed in the deed. He had been neglected by the officials and neglected by the saints; the best, or those who ought to be the best, the priest and the Levite, had deserted him, and left him to die. The Samaritan is neither saint nor official, but yet he steps in to do the deed. Oh, Christian brethren, take care that ye are not put to shame by this Samaritan.

He is a model to us next in *the spirit in which he did his work.* He did it without asking questions. The man was in need, he was sure of that, and he helped him at once; doing so without hesitation, and making no compact nor agreement with him, but at once proceeding to pour in the oil and wine. He did it without attempting to shift the labour from himself to others. Charity nowadays means that A asks B to help him, and B, in his wonderful charity, does him the great favour of sending him on to C. That is to say, the common run of benevolent persons nowadays put their hands but seldom into their own purses, but send people on to a few individuals who find cash for all. It seems to me to be a very mean way of getting rid of a case by saving your own pocket and passing the applicant on to another who is no better off than yourself, but far more generous. The Samaritan was personally benevolent, and therein he is a mirror and model to us all.

He did it without any selfish fear: the thieves might have been upon him, but he cared nothing for thieves when a life was in danger. Here is a man in want, and the man must be relieved, thieves or no thieves, and he does it. He does it with self-denial, for he finds oil and wine, and money at the inn, and everything, though he was by no means a rich man, for he gave two pence, a larger sum than it looks, but still a small sum. He did not fling his alms about because he was rich: he is not said to have given a handful of pence, but two, for he had to count his pence as he expended them. It was a poor Samaritan who did this rich and noble act: the poorest can help the poor; even those who feel distress themselves may manifest a generous Christian spirit, and give their services. Let them do so as they have opportunity.

This man helped his poor neighbour with great tenderness and care. He was like a mother to him. Everything was done with loving thought and with whatever of skill he possessed. He did the best he could.

Brethren, let what we do for others always be done in the noblest style. Let us not treat the poor like dogs to whom we fling a bone, nor visit the sick like superior beings who feel that they are stooping down to inferiors when they enter their rooms; but in the sweet tenderness of real love, learned at Jesu's feet, let us imitate this good Samaritan.

But *what did he do?* Well, first he came to where the sufferer was, and put himself into his position. Then he put forth all his skill for him, and bound up his wounds, no doubt rending his own garment to get the bands with which to bind up the wound. He poured in oil and wine, the best healing mixture that he knew of, and one which he happened to have by him. He then set the sick man on his mule, and of course he had to walk himself, but this he did right cheerfully, supporting his poor patient as the mule proceeded. He took him to an inn, but he did not leave him at the caravanserai and say, "Anybody will take care of him now," but he went to the manager of the establishment and gave him money, and he said, "Take care of him." I admire that little sentence, because it is first written, "he took care of him," and next he said, "Take care of him." What you do yourself you may exhort other people to do. He said, "I leave this poor man with you, pray do not neglect him. There are a great many people in the inn, but take care of him." "Is he a brother of yours?" "No, I never saw him before." "Well, are you at all under obligation to him?" "No!—yes, yes, I feel under obligation to everybody that is a man. If he wants help I am obliged to help him." "Is that all?" "Yes, but do take care of him. I feel a great interest in him."

The Samaritan did not cease till he had gone through with his kindness. He said, "This money may not be sufficient, for it may be a long time before he is able to move. That leg may not soon heal, that broken rib may need long rest. Do not hurry him away, let him stop here, and if he incurs additional expense, I will be sure to pay it when I come back from Jerusalem again." There is nothing like the charity which endures even to the end. I wish I had time to enlarge on all these things, but I cannot do so; exhibit them in your lives, and you will best know what they mean. Go and do likewise, each one of you, and thus reproduce the good Samaritan.

IV. But now, fourthly, WE HAVE A HIGHER MODEL than even the Samaritan—our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not think that our divine Lord intended to teach anything about himself in this parable, except so far as he is himself the great exemplar of all goodness. He was answering the question, "Who is my neighbour?" and he was not preaching about himself at all. There has been a great deal of straining of this parable to bring the Lord Jesus and everything about him into it, but this I dare not imitate. Yet by analogy we may illustrate our Lord's goodness by it. This is a picture of a generous hearted man who cares for the needy: but the most generous hearted man that ever lived was the Man of Nazareth, and none ever cared for sick and suffering souls as he has done. Therefore, if we praise the good Samaritan, we should much more extol the blessed Saviour whom his enemies called a Samaritan, and who never denied the charge, for what cared he if all the prejudice and scorn of men should vent itself on him?

Now, brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ has done better than the good

Samaritan, because our case was worse. As I have already said, the wounded man could not blame himself for his sad estate; it was his misfortune, not his fault; but you and I are not only half dead, but altogether dead in trespasses and sins, and we have brought many of our ills upon ourselves. The thieves that have stripped us are our own iniquities, the wounds which we bear have been inflicted by our own suicidal hand. We are not in opposition to Jesus Christ as the poor Jew was to the Samaritan from the mere force of prejudice, but we have been opposed to the blessed Redeemer by nature; we have from the first turned away from him. Alas, we have resisted and rejected him. The poor man did not put his Samaritan friend away, but we have done so to our Lord. How many times have we refused Almighty love! How often by unbelief have we pulled open the wounds which Christ has bound up! We have rejected the oil and wine which in the gospel he presents to us. We have spoken evil of him to his face, and have lived even for years in utter rejection of him, and yet in his infinite love he has not given us up, but he has brought some of us into his church, where we rest as in an inn, feeding on what his bounty has provided. It was wondrous love which moved the Saviour's heart when he found us in all our misery, and bent over us to lift us out of it, though he knew that we were his enemies.

The Samaritan was akin to the Jew because he was a man, but our Lord Jesus was not originally akin to us by nature: he is God, infinitely above us, and if he was "found in fashion as a man" it was because he chose to be so. If he journeyed this way, *via* Bethlehem's manger, down to the place of our sin and misery, it was because his infinite compassion brought him there. The Samaritan came to the wounded one because in the course of business he was led there, and, being there, he helped the man; but Jesus came to earth on no business but that of saving us, and he was found in our flesh that he might have sympathy with us. In the very existence of the man Christ Jesus you see the noblest form of pity manifested.

And being here, where we had fallen among robbers, he did not merely run risks of being attacked by thieves himself, but he was attacked by them: he was wounded, he was stripped, and not half dead was he, but altogether dead, for he was laid in the grave. He was slain for our sakes, for it was not possible for him to deliver us from the mischief which the thieves of sin had wrought upon us excepting by suffering that mischief in his own person; and he did suffer it that he might deliver us.

What the Samaritan gave to the poor man was generous, but it is not comparable to what the Lord Jesus has given to us. He gave him wine and oil, but Jesus has given his heart's blood to heal our wounds: "he loved us and gave himself for us." The Samaritan *lent* himself with all his care and thoughtfulness, but Christ *gave* himself even to the death for us. The Samaritan gave two pence, a large amount out of his slender store, and I do not depreciate the gift, but "he that was rich for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be rich." Oh, the marvellous gifts which Christ has bestowed upon us! Who is he that can reckon them! Heaven is among those blessings, but his own self is the chief boon.

The Samaritan's compassion did but show itself for a short time. If he had to walk by the side of his mule it would not be for many miles, but Christ walked by the side of us, dismounted from his glory, all through his life. The Samaritan did not stop long at the inn, for he had his business to attend to, and he very rightly went about it; but our Lord remained with us for a lifetime, even till he rose to heaven: yea, he is with us even now, always blessing the sons of men.

When the Samaritan went away he said, "Whatsoever thou spendest more I will repay thee." Jesus has gone up to heaven, and he has left behind him blessed promises of something to be done when he shall come again. He never forgets us. The good Samaritan, I dare say, thought very little of the Jew in after years; indeed, it is the mark of a generous spirit not to think much of what it has done. He went back to Samaria and minded his business, and never told anybody "I helped a poor Jew on the road." Not he. But of necessity our Lord Jesus acts differently, for because we have a constant need he continues to care for us, and his deed of love is being done, and done, and done again upon multitudes of cases, and will always be repeated so long as there are men to be saved, a hell from which to escape, and a heaven to win.

I have thus set before you the highest example, and I shall conclude when I have said two things. *Judge yourselves*, all ye my hearers, if ye are hoping for salvation by your own works. Look to what you must be throughout an entire life if your works are to save you. You must love God with all your heart and soul and strength, and your neighbour in this Samaritan's fashion, even as yourself, and both of these without a single failure. Have you done this? Can you hope to do it perfectly? If not, why do you risk your souls in this frail skiff, this leaky, sinking craft of your poor works, for you will never get to heaven therein?

Lastly, you who are Christ's people are saved, and you are not going to do these things in order to save yourselves: the greater Samaritan has saved you, Jesus has redeemed you, brought you into his church, put you under the care of his ministers, bidden us take care of you, and promised to reward us if we do so in the day when he comes. *Seek, then, to be true followers of your Lord* by practical deeds of kindness, and if you have been backward in your gifts to help either the temporal or the spiritual needs of men, begin from this morning with generous hearts, and God will bless you. O divine Spirit, help us all to be like Jesus. Amen.

Good News for You

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was"—Luke x. 33.

THE good Samaritan is a masterly picture of true benevolence. The Samaritan had no kinship with the Jew, he was purely of foreign origin, yet he pities his poor neighbour. The Jews cursed the Cuthites, and would have no dealings with them, for they were intruders in their land. There was nothing therefore, in the object of the Samaritan's pity that could excite his national sympathies, but everything to arouse his prejudices, hence the grandeur of his benevolence.

It is not my intention this morning, to indicate the delightful points of excellence which Christ brings out in order to illustrate what true charity will perform. I want you only to notice this one fact, that the benevolence which the Samaritan exhibited towards this poor wounded and half-dead man, was available benevolence. He did not say to him, "If you will walk to Jericho, then I will bind up your wounds, pouring in the oil and wine;" or, "If you will journey with me as far as Jerusalem, I will then attend to your wants." Oh, no, he came "where he was," and finding that he could do nothing whatever for his own assistance, the good Samaritan began with him there and then upon the spot, putting no impossible conditions to him, proposing no stipulations which the man could not perform, but doing everything for the man, and doing it for him as he was and where he was.

Beloved, we are all quite aware that a charity of which a man cannot avail himself, is no charity at all. Go among the operatives of Lancashire, and tell them that there is no necessity for any of them to starve, for on the top of Mt. St. Bernard there are hospitable monks who keep a refectory, where they relieve all passers-by; tell them they have nothing to do but to journey to the top of the Alps, and there they will find food enough. Poor souls! they feel that you mock them, for the distance is too great. Penetrate one of our back streets, climb up three pair of stairs into a wretched room, so dilapidated that the stars look between the tiles, see a poor young girl dying of consumption and poverty, tell her if you dare, "If you could get to the sea-side, and if you could eat so much beef-steak, you would no doubt recover." You are shamefully laughing at her—she cannot get these things—they are

beyond her reach: she cannot journey to the seaside—she would die ere she reached it. Like the wicked, your tender mercies are cruel. I have noticed this unavailing charity in hard winters. People give away bread and soup tickets to poor people, who are to give sixpence, and then receive soup and bread; and often I have had persons come to me—"Sir, I have a ticket; it would be worth a great deal to me, if I had sixpence to go with to get the relief; but I have not a farthing in all the world, and I cannot make out the good of giving me this ticket at all." This is hardly charity. Think you see Jeremiah, down in the low dungeon: if Ebed-melech and Baruch had stood over the top of the dungeon, and called out to him, "Jeremiah, if you will get half way up, we will pull you out," when there was not a ladder, nor any means by which he could possibly get so far, how cruel would have been this charity; but, instead thereof, they took old rags from under the king's treasury, and put them on ropes, and bade him put the rags under his armholes, and sling his arms through the ropes, and then they pulled him up all the way. This was available charity; the other would have been hypocritical pretence. Brethren, if in the description of a good Samaritan, Christ hits him off to the life, as giving to this poor wounded man a charity of which he could avail himself, does it not seem to be strongly probable—nay, even certain—that when Christ comes to deal with sinners, he gives them available mercy—grace which may be of real service to them.

Hence, permit me to say, I do not believe in the way in which some people pretend to preach the gospel. They have no gospel for sinners as sinners, but only for those who are above the dead level of sinnership, and are technically styled *sensible* sinners. Like the priest in this parable; they see the poor sinner, and they say, "He is not conscious of his need, we cannot invite him to Christ;" "He is dead," they say, "it is of no use preaching to dead souls;" so they pass by on the other side, keeping close to the elect and quickened, but having nothing whatever to say to the dead, lest they should make out Christ to be too gracious, and his mercy to be too free. The Levite was not in quite such a hurry as the priest. The priest had to preach, and might be too late for the service, and therefore he could not stop to relieve the man; besides, he might have soiled his cassock, or made himself unclean; and then he would have been hardly fit for the dainty and respectable congregation over which he officiated. As for the Levite, he had to read the hymns; he was a clerk in the church, and he was somewhat in a hurry, but still he could get in after the opening prayer, so he indulged himself with the luxury of looking on. Just as I have known ministers say, "Well, you know we ought to describe the sinner's state, and warn him, but we must not invite him to Christ." Yes, gentlemen, you must pass by on the other side, after having looked at him, for on your own confession you have no *good* news for the poor wretch. I bless my Lord and Master he has given to me a gospel which I can take to *dead* sinners, a gospel which is available for the vilest of the vile. I thank my Master that he does not say to the sinner, "Come half way and meet me," but he comes "where he is," and finding him ruined, lost, obdurate, he meets him on his own ground, and gives him life and peace without

asking, or expecting him to prepare himself for grace. Here is, I think, set forth in my text, the available benevolence of the Samaritan; it is mine this morning, to show the available grace of Christ.

I. The sinner is WITHOUT MORAL QUALIFICATION FOR SALVATION, but Christ comes where he is.

I want, if I can, not to talk about this as a matter having to do with the multitude that are abroad, but with us in these pews. I speak not of *them* and *those*, but of *you* and *me*. I want to say to every sinner, "You are in a state in which there is nothing morally that can qualify you for being saved, but Jesus Christ meets you where you now are."

1. Remember first, that when the gospel was first sent into the world, *those to whom it was sent, were manifestly without any moral qualification.* Did you ever read the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans? It is one of those awful passages in Scripture, not intended to be read in congregations; but to be read and studied in the secrecy of one's chamber. The apostle gives a portrait of the manners and customs of the heathen world, so awful, that unless our missionaries had informed us, that it is exactly the photograph of life in Hindostan at the present moment, infidels might have declared that Paul had exaggerated. Heathendom in the time of Paul, was so desperately wicked that it would be utterly impossible to conceive of a sin, into which men had not fallen; and yet, "We turn unto the Gentiles," said the apostle; and yet the Lord himself commanded, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." What! to Sodomites, whose very smallest sin is adultery, and fornication; to thieves and murderers, to murderers of fathers and mothers? Yes, go and preach the gospel *to them!* Manifestly, the fact that the world was steeped up to its very throat in the filth of abominable wickedness, and yet the gospel was sent to it, proves that Christ does not seek for any qualification of morality, or righteousness in man, before the gospel is available to him. He sends the Word to the drunkard, to the swearer, the harlot, the vilest of the vile; for such is the gospel of Christ intended to save.

2. Recollect again, *the Biblical descriptions of those whom Christ came into the world to save, which prove to a demonstration that he comes to the sinner where he is.* How does the Bible describe those whom Christ came to save? As men? No, my brethren; Christ did not come to save men as men, but men as sinners. As sensible sinners?—nay, I aver not; they are described as "*dead* in trespasses and sins." But to the law and to the testimony, let me read you one or two passages; and, while I read them, I hope you may be able to say, "There is hope for me." First, those whom Christ came to save are described in 1 Timothy, i. 15, and many other places, as "*sinners*." "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "Sinners," without any adjective before the word; not awakened sinners, not repenting sinners; but sinners as sinners. "Surely," saith one, "I am not shut out." Another account is found in Romans v. 6, "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died"—for whom? those who had some desires after God? some respect to his name? nay, "for *the ungodly*." Now, an ungodly

man means a man without God, who cares not for God; "God is not in all his thoughts," and therefore he is not what men call a sensible sinner. "The ungodly are like "the chaff which the wind driveth away:". even these are the persons that Christ came to save. In the same chapter, 10th verse, you find them mentioned as "*enemies*"—"When we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." What say ye to this? they are not described as friends. Christ laid down his life for his friends in one sense; "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Enemies to God were the objects of grace, so that in enmity Christ comes and meets man where he is.

In Ephesians ii. 1, we read of them as "*dead* in trespasses and sins"—"and you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." Christ, then, does not ask the sinner to make himself alive; the gospel is not only to be preached to those who have some good notions, some good desires, some tremblings of the heavenly life within, but to the dead as dead; to the dead doth Christ come, and meet them in the grave of their sin. Again, (Ephesians ii. 3,) they are "*children of wrath*"—"we were by nature the children of wrath even as others." Yet the gospel came to such. Can ye see anything hopeful in a child of wrath? I ask you to look over him from head to foot, if this be his name and character; can ye see a spot of goodness as large as a pin's point in the man? And yet such Christ came to save. Once again, they are mentioned as "*accursed*." Ah," says one sinner, "I have often cursed myself before God, and asked him to curse me." Well, Christ died for the accursed; (Galatians iii. 13,) "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for *us;*" that is, for us who were under the curse. And, once more, they are described by the dreadful word "*lost*." They are lost to all hope, to all consideration for themselves; even their own friends have given their case up as hopeless. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke xix. 10.) If I understand those passages which I have read in your hearing, they mean just this —that those whom Christ came to save have no good whatever in them to co-operate towards their salvation, and Christ doth not look upon them in order to find aught that is good in them. I am bold to say, the only fitness for cleansing is filthiness; the only fitness for a Saviour is being lost; and the only character under which we come to Jesus is as sinners, lost, dead, and accursed.

3. But, thirdly, it is quite certain from *the work of grace itself*, that the Lord does not expect the sinner to do anything or to be anything in order to meet him, bnt that he comes to him where he is. See, sinner, Christ *dies* on Calvary, a weight of sin is on his shoulders, and on his heart; in agonies the most awful he shrieks under the desertion of his God. For whom did he die? For the innocent? Wherefore for the innocent? What sacrifice did they need? For those who had some good thing in them? Why all these agonies *for such?* Surely a less price might do for them if they could eke it out themselves. But because Christ died on account of sin, I take it that those whom he died for must be viewed as sinners, and only as such. Inasmuch as he paid a

dreadful price, I gather that they must be dreadfully in debt, and that he died for those who had nothing to pay with. But Christ *rose again*, rose again for our justification. For whose justification? For the justification of those who were justified in themselves? Why this were to perform an unnecessary work. No, my brethren, but for those who had no justification of their own, not a shadow of any, who were condemned, utterly condemned on account of their own works. Moreover, I hear him by the ear of faith *pleading* before the eternal throne. Who does he plead for? For those who have something to plead on their own account?—that were needless. Do men give their money to the rich? Do they spend their charity on those who do not need it? If men have something to plead for themselves, then why does Christ plead for them? No, brethren, he pleads for those who have nothing whatever that they can bring as an argument with which to enforce their prayers. But Christ ascended and *received gifts*. Who for? For those who merited rewards? No, verily, let them get them for themselves. But he received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. But he *gives the Holy Spirit*. To whom does he give the Holy Spirit? To those that are strong, and good, and can do all themselves? O, my brethren, this were a work of supererogation; but he gives the Holy Spirit to those that are powerless, weak, dead; he gives the Holy Worker to those who are all unholy and full of sin; he puts the omnipotent influence into those who were slaves to the spirit of evil. Brethren, the work of Christ supposes a lost, ruined, rebellious sinner, and so I say, Christ meets the man where he is.

4. Yet more, for I would clear up this point before I leave it, *the godlike character of the grace of God* proves that he meets the sinner where he is. If God forgive little sinners only, then he is little in his mercy. If the Lord does not do something more than men can think, then we have made too much noise about the gospel, and have exalted the cross above measure. Unless there be something extraordinary in divine grace, then I cannot understand such a passage as this, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts." I venture to say, brethren, that many of us have thought of forgiving our enemies. It has sometimes been our happy portion to do good to them that hate us. Now, if God would be godlike in his grace—and I am sure he will—he must do something more than that; he must not only forgive his enemies, but they must be enemies of such an atrocious character that no *man* would have forgiven them.

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee,
> Or who hath grace so rich and free."

But where is the meaning of this boast, if the Lord merely pardons sinners who are sensible of their sins, and lament them? The marvel is in this, that while they are yet enemies he calls them by his grace, and invites them to mercy; yea, more, he blots out their sins, and makes them friends; thus meeting the sinner where he is.

5. *The spirit and genius of the gospel utterly forbid the supposition that God requires anything in any man in order to save him.* If salvation be

offered to man upon a condition, they who fulfil the condition have a claim to the blessing. This is the old covenant of works. The substance of the legal covenant is, "Do this and I will reward you." When the man has done it, he deserves what has been promised. Yes, and if you make the condition never so easy, yet, mark you, so long as it be a condition, God is bound by his own Word, the condition being fulfilled, to give man what he has earned. This is works and not grace; it is debt and not free favour. But, inasmuch as the gospel is free favour from beginning to end, I am absolutely sure that God asketh nothing; neither good wishes, good desires, nor good feelings of a sinner before he may come to Christ. But that he may know that everything is of grace, the rebel is commanded to come just as he is, bringing nothing, but taking everything from God, who is superabundant in mercy, and therefore meeteth the sinner just where he is.

I say to the sinner, wherever thou mayest be to-day, if thou be without any virtue, and if thou be filled with all vice, if there be no good points in thy character, but if there be everything that is bad against man and against God; if thou hast committed every crime in the catalogue, if thou hast ruined thy body and damned thy soul, yet still Christ hath said it, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." And if thou comest to him, he can no more cast thee out than if thou hadst been the most virtuous, the most honourable, and the most devout of all living men. Only do thou to-day believe in the mercy of God, in Christ, and cast thyself on Him, and thou art saved to the praise and glory of that grace which meets thee just where thou art, and saveth thee from sin.

II. In the second place, there are very many of the lost race of Adam, who say that they are WITHOUT ANY MENTAL QUALIFICATION.

This is their excuse—"But, sir, I never was a scholar. I was sent out as a boy to earn my own living, so that I never had a week's schooling; I am so ignorant that I cannot read my book, and if anybody were to ask me to make a prayer I could not, I have not sense enough." Now, you see the Lord Jesus meets you just where you are. And how does he do this? Why, first, *the saving act is one that requires no mental power.* Faith lays hold on eternal life. Now, a child whose faculties are never so little developed can believe what it is told. The child cannot reason, cannot argue, cannot dispute, cannot split hairs, cannot see a knotty point in theology, but it can believe what it is told. Faith requires so little mental vigour or intellectual clearness, that there have been many who were idiots in other things, who have been made wise unto salvation by the act of faith in Christ. You remember our Lord's own words, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." But this never could have happened had not the act which brings us into communion with Christ been the lowest act of the human faculty, that of simply trusting to Christ, as the result of crediting that which is told us upon good testimony.

But then, again, to meet this defect of mental power, remember *the singular simplicity of that which is believed.* Is there anything more simple in the world than the doctrine of the atonement. We deserve to die, Christ dies for us; we are in debt, Christ pays for us. Is not

this plain enough for a Ragged School? It is so plain, that many of our learned doctors of divinity try to get it out of the Bible; they think, "If this be the marrow of it all, then any fool can be a theologian;" so they kick against it. What is Unitarianism but a stumbling at the simplicity of the cross. They were Unitarians who stood at the cross when Christ died; they said, "Let him come down from the cross and we will believe on him." That has been the Unitarian character ever since; they will receive Jesus anywhere but on his cross; but up there, dying in man's stead, he is so commonplace, that these great gentlemen run to philosophy and vain deceit sooner than lay hold on that which the commonest may as fully understand as they.

Yet more; to meet any mental deficiency in man, while the truth itself is simple, it is *taught in the Bible under such simple metaphors*, that none can say they cannot understand it. How simple is the metaphor of the brazen serpent, held up before the snake-bitten Israelites, while they are commanded to look and live. Who does not understand that a look at Christ who dies in the stead of men, will make them live? "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Who does not understand the figure of a fountain flowing in the streets, that every thirsty passer-by may put his lips down and drink? "Behold the Lamb of God." Who does not understand the sacrifice? Here is a lamb killed for the sin of Israel, and so Christ dies for the sin of those who believe in him. The act of faith is simple, the object of faith is plain; the metaphors make it clear, and he is without excuse who does not understand the gospel of Christ.

To crown all, to you, my beloved hearers, Christ *has given you abundance of teachers*. There sits in your pew with you to-day a man of your own rank and calling, who will explain to you the gospel, if you do not understand it. Here are many of us, who are but too glad if we can roll away the stone from the door of your sepulchre; here are children of God themselves saved by sovereign grace, and if you really do not know the way, do but touch your next neighbour, and say to him, "Can you explain to me yet more clearly what I must do to be saved?" Now, this is meeting you, let your brains be of the very smallest; this is coming down to you though you sit on the lowest step of human intellect. Jesus Christ meets you just where you are.

III. But yet again. I think I hear another say, "I am in despair, for I CANNOT FIND ANY REASON IN MYSELF, OR OUT OF MYSELF, WHY GOD SHOULD FORGIVE SUCH A PERSON AS I AM."

So then, you are in a hopeless state, at least you see no hope. The Lord meets you where you are, by putting *the reason of your salvation altogether in himself*. Shall I remind you of one or two texts which will surely satisfy you? "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." What for? "For mine own sake." He cannot pardon you for your sake, you clearly see that; and you feel that he cannot pardon you for other people's sake; but for "*my own sake*," saith he, "that I may glorify myself." Not in you, but in his own mighty breast he finds the motive, that he may make his own mercy illustrious; for his own sake he will do it. Or take another—"For my name's sake, even for my name's sake, will I

defer mine anger, that I cut thee not off." Here it is again for his *name's sake*, as if he knew he could not find any other motive, so he puts it all on himself; he pardons that he may honour and glorify his own name. Sinner, thou canst not say that this does not meet thy case: for if thou be the most hellish good-for-nothing sinner that ever cursed God's earth, and polluted the air thou breathest, yet he can save thee, *for his own sake*. There still is room for thee to hope; for the bigger the sinner thou be the more glory to him if he saveth thee; and if salvation be given for a reason only in himself, there is therefore yet a reason by which he can save thee, even thee.

Remember, that *he puts his own design* before your eyes to show you that if you have no reason in yourself, that is no hindrance to his saving you. What is God's design in saving men? When he brings them to heaven, what will be the result of it? Why, that they may love and praise his name for ever, and sing "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, unto him be glory." You are just the man; if you are ever saved, and brought to heaven, oh, will not you praise his grace? "Yes," said one old man who had long lived in sin, "if he ever does bring me to heaven, he shall never hear the last of it, for I will praise him throughout eternity." Why, you are the man, do you not see, you are the very man that will answer God's design, for who shall love so much as he who has had much forgiven, and who shall praise so loudly as he whose mighty sins have been overcome by the mighty love and goodness and grace of God? Thou canst not say that it does not meet thee, for here is a motive and a reason, though thou canst find none in thyself.

Here is another reason why God should save thee, it is *His own Word*, the Word of him that cannot lie. I will bring up that text again; perhaps there is a heart here that will be able to cast anchor on it—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." You say, "But if I come, I can see no reason why he should save me." I answer, there is a reason in His own promise. God cannot lie. You come; he will not cast you out. He says, "I will in no wise cast out;" but you say, "He may for such-and-such a reason." Now, this is a flat contradiction; the two cannot stand. If there be anything that is necessary in order for a soul to come, and you come without it, yet there is the promise, and as it has no limit in it plead it, and the Lord will not refuse to honour his own Word. If he can cast you out because you have not some necessary qualification, then his Word is not true. Whoever you may be, whatever you may not be, and whatever you may be, if you believe in Jesus Christ, there is a reason in every attribute of God why you should be saved. His truth cries, "Save him, for thou hast said 'I will.'" His power says, "Save him, lest the enemy deny thy might." God's wisdom pleads, "Save him, lest men doubt thy judgment." His love says, "Save him;" his every attribute says, "Save him;" and even Justice, with its hoarse voice, cries, "Save him, for God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, if we confess our sins."

I am trying to fish in deep waters after some of you that have long escaped the net. I know when I have given free and full invitations, you have said, "Ah! that cannot mean me." You are without faith in

Christ, because you think you are not fit. I will be clear of your blood this morning; I will show you that there is no fitness wanted, that you are commanded now to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as you are, for Jesus Christ's gospel is an available gospel, and comes to you just where you are. Without moral or mental qualification, and without any sort of reason why he should save you, he meets you as such, and bids you trust him.

IV. We proceed to our fourth point. "Oh," says one, "but I am WITHOUT COURAGE; I dare not believe on Christ, I am such a timid, trembling soul, that when I hear that others trust to Christ I think it must be presumption; I wish I could do the same but I cannot, I am kept under by such a sense of sin, that I dare not. O sir, I dare not, it would look as if I were flying in the face of justice if I were to dare to trust Christ, and then to rejoice in the pardon of my sin." Very well, Christ comes to meet you where you are, by very tender *invitations*. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." How sweetly he puts it to you. I do not know where more wooing words could be found, than those the Saviour uses. Will you not come when Christ beckons, when with his loving face streaming with tears, he bid you come to him. What! is an invitation from him too little a thing for you. O sinner, trembling though thou art, say in thy soul,

> "I'll to the gracious king approach,
> Whose sceptre pardon gives;
> Perhaps he may command my touch,
> And then the suppliant lives."

Knowing that you would neglect the invitation, he has put it to you in the light of a *command*. "This is the commandment, that ye believe on Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." He thought you would say, "Ah, but I am not fit to accept the invitation." "Well," says he, "I will command the man to do it." Like a poor hungry man with bread before him, who says, "Ah, it would be presumption on my part to eat;" but the king says, "Eat, sir, or I will punish you." What a generous and liberal command; even the threat itself has no anger in it. Like the mother, who when the child is near to die, and nothing will save it but the medicine, and the child will not drink, she threatens the child, but only out of love to it that it may be saved. So the Lord doth add *threatenings* to commands; for sometimes a black word will drive a soul to Christ where a bright word would not draw it. Fears of hell sometimes make men flee to Jesus. The weary wing made the poor dove fly to the ark: and the thunderbolts of God's justice are only meant to make thee fly to Christ the Lord.

Beloved, once more, my Master has sweetly met your want of courage by bringing many others, so that you may follow their *example*. As fowlers sometimes have their decoy-birds, so my Master hath decoy-birds that are to draw others to him. Other sinners have been saved, others he has cleansed who did but trust him. There was Lot. Ah, Lot! guilty of drunkenness and incest, and yet a saint of God. David the adulterer and murderer of Uriah, and yet washed "whiter than snow." Manasseh the bloody persecutor, who had cut Esaias in two, sawing him in halves, and yet he was taken among the thorns, and God had mercy on him. What shall I say of Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor of God's people? and the robber dying on the cross for his crimes, and yet saved? Sinner, if these do not induce thee to come, what can overcome thy sinful diffidence? "But," says one, "you have not hit my case yet; I am an outrageous sinner!" Well now, I will hit it this time. In 1 Corinthians, vi. 9, hear the Word of the Lord, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And *such were some of you:* but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Why, brethren, what horrible descriptions there are here; there are some of them so bad that when we have read the description, we wish to forget the sin; and yet, and yet, glory be to thine Almighty grace, O God! such hast thou saved, and such thou canst save still. O, timid sinner, can you not trust in Jesus after this? Hear ye the Word of the Lord again (Titus iii. 3—5), "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved *us*." Now, you hateful sinners, and you that hate others; you that are full of malice and envy, here is the gate open even for you, for the kindness and love of God towards man appears in the person of Christ. Listen to another, for God's words are more than mine, and I do hope they will attract some of you (Ephesians ii. 1—3): "Dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by

grace ye are saved,) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." What for? "That in the ages to come,"—mark this—he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." One more passage, and I will not weary your attention. O that this last passage might comfort some of you, it is Paul who speaks (1 Timothy i. 13), "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying," see how he puts it from his own experience, "and worthy of all acceptation;" and therefore worthy of yours, poor sinner; "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." "Ah" says one "but he would not save any more." Let me go on—"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." So that if you trust as Paul did, you shall be saved as Paul was, for his conversion and salvation are a pattern to all those who should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, unto life everlasting. So sinner, timid as you are, here Jesus meets you.

O, I wish I could say a word that would lead you poor tearful ones to look to Jesus. O, do not let the devil tempt you to believe that you are too sinful. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

"Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream."

Fitness is not needed—do but come to him. You are black, and you do not feel your blackness as you ought—that makes you all the blacker. Come, then, and be clean. You are sinful, and this is your greatest sin, that you do not repent as you ought; but come to him, and ask him to forgive your impenitence. Come as you are: if he rejecteth one of you, I will bear the blame for ever; if he casteth one of you away that shall trust him, call me a false prophet in the day of the resurrection. But I pawn my life upon it—I stake my own soul's interest on this—that whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out.

V. I hear one more complaint. "I am WITHOUT STRENGTH," saith one; "will Jesus come just where I am?" Yes, sinner, just where you are. You say you cannot believe, that is your difficulty. God meets you, then, in your inability. First, he meets you with *his promises*. Soul, thou canst not believe; but when God, that cannot lie, promises, will you not believe, can you not believe then? I do think God's promise—so sure, so stedfast—must overcome this inability of yours.

"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." Cannot you believe now? Why, that promise must be true! But next, as if he knew that this would not be enough, he has taken *an oath* with it—and a more awful oath was never sworn—"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel." Can you not believe now? What, will you doubt God when he swears it, not only make God a liar but—let me shudder when I say it—will you think that God can perjure his own self? God forbid you should so blaspheme. Remember, he that believeth not hath made God a liar, because he believeth not on the Son of God. Do not do this. Surely you can believe when the promise and the oath compel you to faith. But yet more, as if he knew that even this were not enough, he has given you of *his Spirit.* "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Surely with this you can believe. "But," saith one, "I will try." No, no, do not try, that is not what God commands you to do; no trying is wanted; believe Christ now, sinner. "But," saith one, "I will think of it." Do not think of it, do it now, do it at once for this is God's gospel. There are some of you standing in these aisles and sitting in these pews, who I feel in my soul will never have another invitation, and if this be rejected to-day, I feel a solemn motion in my soul—I think it is of the Holy Ghost—that you will never hear another faithful sermon, but you shall go down to hell impenitent, unsaved, except ye trust in Jesus *now.* I speak not as a man, but I speak as God's ambassador to your souls, and I command you, in God's name, trust Jesus, trust *now.* At your peril reject the voice that speaks from heaven, for "he that believeth not shall be damned." How shall ye escape if ye neglect so great salvation. When it comes right home to you, when it thrusts itself in your way, oh, if ye will neglect it how can ye escape? With tears I would invite you, and, if I could, would compel you to come in. Why will ye not? O souls, if ye will be damned, if ye make up your mind that no mercy shall ever woo you, and no warnings shall ever move you, then, sirs, what chains of vengeance must you feel that slight these bonds of love. You have deserved the deepest hell, for you slight the joys above. God save you. He will save you, if you trust in Jesus. God help you to trust him even now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Judgment Threatening but Mercy Sparing

"Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also"—Luke xiii. 7, 8.

THE comparison of a man to a tree, and of human works to fruit, is exceedingly common in Scripture, because it is most suggestive, natural, and appropriate. As fruit is the production of the tree's life, and the end for which the tree exists, so obedience to the divine will, and holiness unto the Lord, should be the product of man's life, and for it he was at first created. When men plant trees in a vineyard, they very naturally expect to find fruit thereon; and if at the age and season of fruitbearing they find no produce, their natural and justifiable expectation is disappointed. Even thus, speaking after the manner of men, it is natural that the great Maker of all should look for the good fruit of obedience and love from the men who are the objects of his providential care, and be grieved when he meets with no return. Man is very much more God's property than a tree can ever be the property of the man who plants a vineyard; and as God has spent so much more skill and wisdom in the creation of a man than a husbandman can have spent in the mere planting of trees, it becomes the more natural that God should look for fruit from his creature, man; and the more reasonable that his most righteous requirements should not be refused. Trees that bring not forth fruit must be cut down; and sinners who bring not forth repentance, faith, and holiness, must die. It is only a matter of time as to whether or not the vineyard shall be cleared of the incumbrance of its barren trees; it is but a matter of time as to when the world shall be delivered from the burdensome presence of barren souls. It stands to reason that barren trees which soon become the haunts of all sorts of mischief-doing creatures, should be a nuisance to the vineyard; neither can sinners be permitted for ever to become the dwelling-places of evil spirits, and the dens of iniquity: a thorough riddance must be made of impenitent sinners as well as of rotten trees. There is a time for felling fruitless trees, and there is an appointed season for hewing down and casting into the fire the useless sinner.

I. We shall not linger on the threshold of our solemn work this morning, for our burden is very heavy, and we would fain be rid of it speedily. We shall address ourselves at once to those persons who are living without God and without Christ, among whom many of my hearers

must be numbered. We shall speak to those who are not saved: there are such in the professing Church everywhere, O may the Holy Spirit find them out by our word, and bring them in real earnest to consider their ways. To all unprofitable, unfruitful sinners, we utter this hard, but needful sentence: TO CUT YOU DOWN WOULD BE MOST REASONABLE. It is right and reasonable to fell barren trees, and it is just as right and reasonable that *you* should be cut down.

1. This will appear in the first place, if we reflect, that *this is the shortest and the surest way to deal with you;* it will cost the least trouble, and be most certainly effectual in removing you from the place to which you are an injury rather than a benefit. When the owner of the vineyard says to the gardener concerning the tree, "Cut it down," the remedy is very sharp, but it is very simple; the felling is soon done, the clearance is thorough, and when another tree is planted the benefit is evident. To dig about the tree, to trench it, to dung it, to prune it, and water it; all this is a long affair, requiring care, and labour, and attention, while after all, the process may fail and love's labour may be lost. To spare is difficult and involves trouble; to cut down is easy and effectual. Unconverted hearer, to preach the gospel to you, to call you to repentance, to entreat, exhort, instruct, and warn you, is a laborious process, and will probably be unsuccessful after all. The work will require much thought; providential agencies must be directed with wisdom, saints must pray with earnestness, ministers must plead with tears, the Scriptures must be written, and those Scriptures must be expounded and explained; all this is more than thou hast any natural right to expect that God should do with thee, when he has in his hands a far simpler remedy by which he may at once ease himself of his adversary, and prevent thy being any further offence: he has but to take away thy breath and permit thy body to descend into the grave and thy soul into hell, and the vineyard is clear, and there is room for another tree. This sharp, short, simple process, is one which commends itself to men in the case of trees, and it is one which it is a thousand wonders that the Lord has not used with thee. There will be no more blaspheming God, sinner, when the axe has laid thee low! There will be no more rejecting the promise of his mercy, no more violating of Sabbath days, no more despising Scripture, when the day of doom arrives! Death shall end all these abominations for ever. We shall no more have to agonize for you in vain, no more shall we weep bitterly because of your hardness of heart, no longer study to meet your objections, and sigh at your constant oppositions; the flames of hell will end all this, to your sad and awful cost. No longer will a longsuffering God be wearied with your sins, and pressed down under the load of your iniquities. He will make short work in righteousness, and a clean work too. He will sweep you away with the besom of destruction, and your rebellions will have an end, and your iniquities a reward most sure and terrible. Barren fig-tree, you will draw the fatness from the ground no longer, and overshadow with evil influence your fellow trees no more. You are become a mere waste, and worse than a waste. Sinner, I ask you, is not the readiest plan to be rid of you suggested by the text, "Cut it down"? You yourself would do thus with a tree; what reason is there why the Lord should not deal thus with you?

Do you argue that you are of far greater importance than a tree? How do you make this appear? A tree is far more valuable to you than you can be supposed to be to the infinite God. The gardener would lose something possibly by cutting down his tree, but how canst thou suppose that thy ruin would be any damage to the great God! The man who has many acres of vineyard is not much distressed if one barren vine be cut down; for there are so many more. If God had but one man in his dominions, it might seem to be of importance whether that man were saved or not; but there are so many of our race that your loss will be no more than the blowing of one atom of sand from the shore, or the removal of one drop from the sea. You yourself could not well complain of being cut down, for you do not think much of your own soul; you are not concerned about its salvation; you trifle with its best interests. Why should you expect another to value you at a higher rate than you have set upon yourself? You fling away your soul for passing joys; you neglect the great salvation; you live in daily disobedience against God, who alone can do you good; even the preaching of the gospel, that all-powerful engine, seems to have no effect upon you, because you despise your own self. Well, man, if God despises you too, and commands his angels to cut you down, you cannot complain: it is but reasonable that God should estimate you at your own price, and weigh you in your own balances. You have wantonly used the axe to yourself on many occasions, why should not the proper executioner use it in earnest? Some men ruin their health by their sins; they wildly dash the axe against their own root, and wound themselves terribly. On your soul you are using that axe continually, for you damage it by sin, and seek out folly, and choose the way to damnation, and labour to be lost. You cannot, therefore, complain. The crushing of you will be of no more consequence in this great universe than the killing of some one emmet upon the hill. You will never be missed. You may think greatly of yourself, but you are no more than a mere worm compared with the great universe of God. Beware, O rebellious, unrepentant sinner! My love yearns for your salvation, but my reason approves of your ruin, foresees it, and expects it speedily except you turn unto the Lord and live.

2. Another reason makes the argument for judgment very powerful, namely, *that sufficient space for repentance has already been given.* If there had been any hope of your repentance, methinks many of you would have repented long ago. I do not know what can be done for some of you more than has been done. You have been digged about—the digging, I suppose, is to loosen the roots of their hold upon the earth—and you have had affliction, trial, and trouble, like the gardener's great spade, to wean you from earth, and loosen your hold of carnal things; you have had sickness—you have tossed to and fro upon the bed of pain; you have been in the jaws of death, and the horrid teeth seemed above and beneath you, as though they would enclose you for ever; but all this has been of no avail. Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more. Already some of you have been smitten until your whole head is sick, and your whole heart faint, but you will not hear the rod. By the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, the heart is made better, but in your case it has not been so. Those blue wounds

of yours, those great and grievous afflictions, have not been sanctified to you, but rather you have gone on offending against God, and provoking the Most High.

The gardener spoke of dunging as well as of digging, and some of you have had plentiful helps towards repentance. The gospel has been put close by your roots, hundreds of times; you have a Bible in every house; you have, some of you, had the advantage of godly training from your youth up. You have been warned again, and again, and again, sometimes sternly, sometimes affectionately; you have heard the wooing voice of mercy, and the thundering notes of judgment; but yet, though Jesus Christ's own gospel has been laid close to your root, O barren tree, you are barren still. What is the use then of sparing you? Sparing has been tried, and it has had no effect: the other remedy is certain—"*Cut it down.*" O God, cut not down the sinner! and yet we dare not say it would be unreasonable, but on the contrary, the most natural result of slighted mercy. O sinner, you may well say—

> "I have long withstood his grace,
> Long provoked him to his face;
> Would not hearken to his calls;
> Grieved him by a thousand falls.
>
> Depths of mercy! can there be
> Mercy still reserved for me?
> Can my God his wrath forbear?
> Me, the chief of sinners spare?"

3. Sinner, I argue thy case somewhat harshly, thou thinkest. Ah! man, would God I could make thee think *me* harsh, if thou wouldst but have pity on thine own soul, for my harshness is only apparent, not real, and thy carelessness for thy soul is real harshness, for thou carest not for thine own soul, but treatest it as a thing to be cast away, and its ruin to be laughed at, as though it were contemptible. *All this while there has been no sign of improvement whatever in thee.* If there had been some little fruit, if some tears of repentance had been flowing from thine eyes, if there had been some seeking after Christ, if thine heart had been a little softened, if thou hadst but a little faith in Jesus, though it were but as a grain of mustard seed, then there were indeed reasons for sparing thee; but, sorrowful to add, *thy sparing has had an ill effect upon thee.* Because God hath not punished thee, therefore thou hast waxed wanton and bold; thou hast said, "Doth God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Thou thinkest that he is altogether such an one as thou art, and that he will never bring thee into judgment. Thou fanciest that his sword is rusted into the scabbard, and his arm waxed short. Strange madness of evil, that thou shouldst pervert the longsuffering which calls thee to repentance into a reason for running to greater lengths of sin! What, when Jehovah spares thee that thou mayst turn to him, shall that very sparing make thee lift up the foot of thy rebellion and spurn him? It has done so. Up to this time thou hast grown hardened instead of softened. Thou hast grown older, but thou art no wiser, except it be with Satan's subtlety to be more wise in sin. The gospel has not now the effect it had once on thee. This voice could make thy soul shiver and thy very blood chill in its veins, but it cannot do so now. These eyes have sometimes

looked on thee and seemed as though they flashed with fire, but now they are dull as lead to thee. Once, when we spoke to thee of the wrath to come, the tears would flow: there were some tears of gentle pity for thine own soul; but ah! it is not so with thee now. You will go your way, and our most earnest tones will seem but as the whistling wind, and our most importunate entreaties as a child's playful song. O God, it is reasonable indeed that thou shouldst uplift that sharp axe of thine and say, "Cut it down." I think I could abundantly justify the severity of God, if now he were to use it, when I thus perceive that all his sparing has had no effect but to make you worse, when I perceive that, notwithstanding these years of waiting, there are no tokens of improvement. If he saith, "Cut it down," justice and reason say, "Ay, Lord, it is well it should be so."

4. But there are other reasons why "Cut it down" is most reasonable, *when we consider the owner and the other trees.* First of all, *here is a tree which brings forth no fruit whatever, and therefore is of no service.* It is like money badly invested, bringing in no interest; it is a dead loss to the owner. What is the use of keeping it? The dead tree is neither use nor ornament: it can yield no service and afford no pleasure. Cut it down by all manner of means. And even so with thee, sinner; what is the use of thee? Thou art of use to thy children, to thy family; in business thou mayst be of some service to the world; but then the world did not make thee; and thy children, and thy family, they did not create thee. God has made thee, God has planted thee, God is thy proprietor—thou hast done nothing for God. Even in coming up to his house to-day, you did not come with any desire to honour God; and to-morrow, if you should chance to give something to the poor, it will not be because they are God's, nor out of love to *him.* You neither pray to God, nor praise God, nor live for God; you live for anything, for everything, for nothing, sooner than live for the God that made you. Then what is the good of you to God? All his other creatures praise him. There is not a spider spinning its web from leaf to leaf but doth his bidding. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;" but thou dost not know. Wouldst thou keep a horse that never did thee service? Wouldst thou have a dog in thy house that never licked thy hand or fawned upon thee, or did thy will? Thou wouldst say, "What is the good of this? A servant in my house to feed upon my bread, to be clothed with my bounty, and yet never to obey me, but to live in constant reckless disregard of my most reasonable commands!" You would say to such a servant, "Get thee gone; thou art no servant of mine." Well might the Lord say this of thee. All these years preserving goodness has winked at the past; longsuffering has borne with thy follies and thy faults, but it cannot be so for ever, for reason demands that a useless thing should not always stand, and "Cut it down," is the natural inference from the uselessness of thy life. Nor is this all. While you have been thus living without yielding anything, *you have been a very costly tree.* The tree in the vineyard does not cost much except to dig about it, and to dung it, and to prune it. There is, of course, the expense of the gardener who has to watch over it, but this is very little. You may let the barren tree stand, for it is no great expense; but see what it costs to keep thee! Thou hast to be

daily fed. The breath in thy nostrils must come from God every moment. There has to be an emanation from omnipotence at every single tick of that clock, or else thou wouldst not live. The complicated machinery of the human body needs to be tended and kept in order by the great Master-Craftsman, or else ere long the cogs would cease to act upon one another, and the wheels would be broken, and the whole machinery would be put out of gear. Thy body is a harp of thousand strings, and fails if one be gone. The good harpist must watch with sedulous care to prevent the strings from snapping. Thou costest God much; much patience, much bounty, much skill. much power. Wherefore should he spare thee? What is there in thee, that he should go on with thee in this manner? Thou wouldst not spare the gnat that was always stinging thee, buzzing in thy face, and every moment insulting thee. If it cost thee much of thy poor gold to spare that poor gnat's life, thou wouldst not be long about it; thou wouldst crush it. And oh! it is a marvel that Jehovah does not deal thus with thee, for thou art more impertinent than that gnat could be. Sinner, if you were in God's place, and were as ill-treated by your creature, as the Lord is by you, would you lavish love and goodness upon him, to receive hardness of heart and rebellion in return? Assuredly not. Judge then whether it be not right that the Lord should say, "Cut it down."

But there is a worse consideration, namely, that *all this while you have been filling up a space which somebody might have been filling to the glory of God.* Where that barren tree stands there might have been a tree loaded with fruit. You are cumbering the ground, as the text says, that is, doing nothing but just being a cumbersome nuisance. If another mother had those children, she would pray for them and weep over them, and teach them of Christ, but you do no such thing. If another man had that money it would be laid out for God's glory, and you lay it out for your own pleasure and forget the God who gave it to you. If another had sat in that seat which you occupy, it may be that he had long ago repented in sackcloth and ashes; but you, like the men of Capernaum, have been hardened instead of being softened under the gospel. It may be, man of influence, if another had stood where you have stood in the world's judgment, he would have led hundreds in the path of right, but you, standing there, have done no such thing. Oh! if another had your gifts, young man, he would not be making a company laugh at the tavern, but pleading with all his might for Jesus. If another had but your gifts of utterance, he would be spending in prayer and teaching what you now spend in fun and frolic to make amusement for fools. Oh! if another had that time to live in, he would live in earnest for his Master. If that young saint, just going through the flood, had your health and vigour, how would he spend and be spent! I recollect a minister of Christ who had but one talent, but much heart, I remember hearing him pray this prayer: "O God, I wish I had ten talents, that I might serve thee better. When I think of some that have them, and do not serve thee with them, I am inclined to pray, "Lord take away their ten talents, and trust me with them if thou wilt, for I do desire to have something more to lay out for thee." Take heed, O my dear but sinful hearer lest the Lord remove thee suddenly, and fill up thy place with one who will be obedient to his will.

Moreover, and to make bad worse even to the worst degree, *all this while ungodly men are spreading an evil influence.* Thinking over the two lines of the verse we have been singing, I felt a horror of great darkness as I realized fully their solemn truthfulness with regard to some of you.

> "I have shed his precious blood,
> Trampled on the Son of God;
> Filled with pains unspeakable
> *I who yet am not in hell.*"

Well may the question arise—

> "*Whence to me this waste of love?*"

It is so apparently a waste of longsuffering and mercy that some transgressors should be spared at all, that they may well marvel. Look at it, and I think you will see it very clearly so, *the very fact that God does not punish sin on the spot is mischievously interpreted.* Men in all ages have drawn a wicked inference from the patience of the great Judge. The Preacher, in Ecclesiastes, says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." "Why," you say, "So-and-so drinks and swears, and he has lived to be a hale, hearty old man. Such an one has plunged into all sorts of folly and wickedness; he was a thief, and everything bad besides, and yet he prospers in the world and grows rich. Instead of God sinking him down at once to hell, he has favoured him, and fattened him as a bullock in rich pasture. "Oh," the worldling says, "there is no justice in God. He does not punish sin." The very fact that you are spared, O sinner, is doing mischief in the world. Do you see that? Your mere existence in this world is to others an inducement to continue in sin; for while you are spared, others look at you and say, "God has not punished him." Therefore they infer that he will not punish sin at all.

Moreover, how many there are of you *whose example is fearfully contagious;* whose lips and lives combine to lead your associates astray from God. In this dreadful murrain which has ravaged our fields and destroyed the cattle, farmers have been advised, as soon as ever the cow is attacked with the disease, to kill it on the spot, and bury it five feet deep out of the way. Let us reflect that the murrain of sin is much more pestilential and more certain to kill than this murrain among the cattle, and therefore stern justice cries, "Let the sinner be at once sent where he cannot increase the plague of iniquity: it is of no use sparing him; he grows no better; all the means used only make him worse, and meanwhile we must look to the welfare of others, lest he perish not alone in his iniquity. He teaches his children to swear; he makes others worldly; the whole current of his life is to incite men to rebel against God: let his desperate course be stopped at once. The leprosy is upon him, and all that he touches he pollutes: for high sanitary reasons, therefore, he must be removed." It is better that one die than that many should be smitten, and therefore, the highest consideration for the good of mankind in general renders it necessary that the mandate should go forth, "Cut it down."

II. Our second most solemn work is to remind thee, O impenitent sinner, that FOR GOD TO HAVE SPARED YOU SO LONG IS A VERY WONDERFUL THING. That the infinitely just and holy God should have spared you, unconverted man, unconverted woman, up till now, is no small thing, but a matter for adoring wonder.

Let me show you this. Consider, *negatively, God is not sparing you because he is insensible towards your sins:* he is angry with the wicked every day. If the Lord could be indifferent towards sin, and could bring his holy mind to treat it as a mere trifle, then it would be no wonder that he should let the transgressor live; but he cannot endure iniquity—all the day long his anger smokes and burns towards evil, and yet he holds back the thunderbolt, and does not smite the guilty. If *you* had been angry half-an-hour, you would have come to hard words or blows; but here is the Judge of all the earth angry every day for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years with some of you, and yet he has not smitten. *It is not because the offence is at a distance*, and therefore far from his observant eye; no—your sins are like smoke in his nose; your iniquities provoke him to his face; you touch the apple of his eye, and yet, for all that, though this accursed thing called sin intrudes into his presence every instant, yet still he has spared you until now. Mark, sinner, he has spared you *not because he was unable to have destroyed you.* He might have bidden the tiles fall from the roof, or the fever might have smitten you in the street; the air might have refused to heave your lungs, or the blood might have ceased its circulation in your veins. The gates to death are many. The quiver of judgment is full of sharp arrows. The Lord has but to will it, and your soul is required of you. He said to the foolish rich man, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee," and he never saw the morning; and he might as easily have sent the same sad message to you, *and what then?* As I have said before, this great patience is not manifested towards your sinful soul because the Lord is at all dependent upon you; your living will not increase, and your dying will not diminish his glory. You will be no more missed than one sere leaf is missed in a forest, or one dewdrop in a thousand leagues of grass. Judgment needs but a word to work its utmost vengeance, and withal you are so provoking that the marvel is that divine severity has spared you so long. Admire and wonder at this longsuffering.

Remember that this wonder is increased, when you *think of the fruit he deserved to have had of you.* A God so good and so gracious, ought to have been loved by you. He has treated you so well, and given you such capacities for pleasure, that he ought to have had some service of you. You are not to God precisely what the ox is to its owner—you give to the ox but his grass or his straw, and you have done with him; but God gives to you not only your daily food, but your very life—you are wholly dependent upon him. Nothing can be so much yours as you are God's. You ought to have served him, to have delighted in that service, to spend and to have been spent for your Lord. He asks no more of you than he ought to have had, and yet he asks you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your strength—this was his first and great commandment, but

this you have constantly, persistently broken. Oh, think then, when you have given to God such a bad return, when he ought to have received so much better—think, I pray you, how you must have provoked him.

And ah, my hearers! I have to touch upon a very solemn part of the business now, when I notice again that some, perhaps here present, *have been guilty of very God-provoking sins.* Some offences provoke God much more than others—I believe that *cursing* does, for it is wanton insolence, by which nothing can be gained. It is altogether a gratuitous piece of insult. To swear, to imprecate the curse of God upon one's limbs and souls, is an unnecessary, supernumerary sin. There cannot be any pleasure in pronouncing oaths, any more than in uttering any other form of words. It is just because man *will* hate his Maker, and will provoke him, that he does this. O sinner, did you ever ask God to damn you, and are you not astonished that he has not done it? Did you ever desire that the blast should come upon you, and do you not marvel that he has not long ago swept you where his wrath would wither you for ever? Swearing is a sin that provokes the Most High. O sinner, abhor this most detestable of vices.

Infidelity, again, and how many are guilty of that? How provoking to God for a man to deny his very existence; standing up and breathing God's air and living upon God's life, and yet saying that there is no God. An insignificant worm dares challenge the Almighty to prove his Godhead and existence by a tremendous act of justice. This is a God-provoking sin.

So again is *persecution.* There may be some here present who have persecuted wife and child because of their following Christ. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye," saith God. Beware, sinner, you will not touch the Lord's eye long without feeling his heavy hand. If any man injures your children the blood is in your cheek at once, if you are a father, and you feel that you will show yourself strong in their defence, even so the heavenly Father will avenge his own elect. Therefore, take heed lest thou persevere in *this* heaven-provoking sin.

And *slander,* too, lying against God's servants, inventing and spreading wicked tales against those who walk in God's fear, this is another evil which awakes the anger of God, and stirs up righteous fury against the man who is guilty of it. Beware! beware!

Filthiness, filthiness of body and of life, will also provoke the Most Holy One. This once brought hell out of heaven upon Sodom; God sent down fire and brimstone because of the lusts of the flesh that made Sodom to stink in his nostrils; the harlot and the adulterer, and the fornicator, shall know that they sin not without provoking God very terribly.

And let me add here among these God-provoking sins, there is that *quenching of conscience* of which some of you have been guilty. Ah, my dear hearers, there are not many of you to whom I spoke under these first heads, for I know that very few of you would indulge in these grosser sins; but there are some of you quite as bad in another sense, for you know the right and choose the wrong; you hear of Christ and do not give your hearts to him. We had hoped of some of you that long ere

this we should have seen you walking in the Lord's fear, but you are still strangers to Christ. You must have had hard work to do this. You must have had a terrible tug with conscience, some of you; I know you have been stifling many a holy desire, and when the Spirit of God has been striving with you, you have been so desperately set on mischief, that still you have gone on in the error of your ways. Now these sins provoke God. I do not believe that I stand in this pulpit and plead with you in God's name, and then go back and tell my Master that you have rejected his warnings, without God's being angry with your hardness of heart and stiffneckedness. I know if we send an Ambassador to a foreign court to try and make peace, and he honestly and earnestly lays down proper stipulations for peace, if they are rejected, you will soon find the newspapers and public opinion ringing with indignation. "Why," they say, "will not the men have peace when the terms are so reasonable? Get out the iron-clads, let them have war—war to the knife. If they will not yield to what is reasonable, then let us dress ourselves in thunder, and go forth across the sea." And what think you. Shall God be always provoked? Shall mercy be preached to you for ever in vain? Shall Christ be presented and always rejected, and will you continue to be his enemies, and shall he never proclaim war against your souls? It is a marvel, it is a wonder that these God-provoking sins have so long been borne with, and that you are not yet cut down.

III. And now, WHAT IS THE REASON FOR ALL THIS LONGSUFFERING? Why is it that this cumber-ground tree has not been cut down? The answer is, because *there is one who pleads for sinners.* I have shown you, and some of you will think I have shown you with very great severity too, how reasonable it is that you should be cut down. I wish you felt it, for, if you felt how reasonable it was that God should send you to hell, then you would begin to tremble, and there would be some hope of you. I can assure you I have trembled for you, when I have thought how rational, how just, nay, it would seem to me, how necessary it was that some of you should be lost—it has made me tremble for you—and I would to God you would tremble for yourselves. But what has been the secret cause that you have been kept alive? The answer is, *Jesus Christ has pleaded for you, the crucified Saviour has interfered for you.* And you ask me "Why?" I answer, because *Jesus Christ has an interest in you all.* We do not believe in general redemption, but we believe in every word of this precious Bible, and there are many passages in the Scripture which seem to show that Christ's death had an universal bearing upon the sons of men. We are told that he tasted death for every man. What does that mean? Does it mean that Jesus Christ died to save every man? I do not believe it does, for it seems to me that everything which Christ intended to accomplish by the act of his death he must accomplish, or else he will be disappointed, which is not supposable. Those whom Christ died to save I believe he will save effectually, through his substitutionary sacrifice. But did he in any other sense die for the rest of mankind? He did. Nothing can be much more plain in Scripture, it seems to me, than that all sinners are spared as the result of Jesus Christ's death, and this is the sense in which men are said to trample on the blood of Jesus Christ. We

read of some who denied the Lord that bought them. No one who is bought with blood for eternal salvation ever tramples on that blood; but Jesus Christ has shed his blood for the reprieve of men that they may be spared, and those who turn God's sparing mercy into an occasion for fresh sin, do trample on the blood of Jesus Christ. You can hold that doctrine without holding universal redemption, or without at all contradicting that undoubted truth, that Jesus laid down his life for his sheep, and that where he suffered he suffered not in vain. Now, sinner, whether thou knowest it or not, thou art indebted to him that did hang upon the tree, for the breath that is now in thee. Thou hadst not been on praying ground and pleading terms with God this morning if it had not been for that dear suffering one. Our text represents the gardener as only *asking* to have it spared; but Jesus Christ did something more than ask; he pleaded, not with his mouth only, but with pierced hands, and pierced feet, and pierced side; and those prevailing pleas have moved the heart of God, and you are yet spared. May I speak to thee then? If thy life had been spared, when thou wast condemned to die, by my intervention—suppose such a case—would you despise *me?* If I had power at the Court, and when you were condemned to die, had gone in and pleaded for you, and you had been reprieved, year after year would you hate me? would you speak against me? would you rail at my character? would you find fault with my friends? I know you better: you would love me; you would be grateful for the sparing of your life. O sinner, I would you would treat the Lord Jesus as you would treat man. I would you would think of the Lord Jesus Christ as you would think of your fellow-man who had delivered you from death. You are not in hell, where you would have been if he had not come in and pleaded for you. I do beseech you, think of the misery of lost souls, and recollect that *you* would have been in such a woful case yourself this morning, if he had not lifted up that hand once pierced for human sin. There, there, where the flames can no abatement know, where a drop of water is a boon too great to be received—there, where hope is excluded, and despair sits upon a throne of iron, binding captive souls in everlasting bands—where "For ever!" is written on the fire, and "For ever!" is printed on the chain, and "For ever! for ever! for ever!" rings out as the awful death-knell of everything like hope, and rest—there you would have been this morning, this morning, if sparing grace had not prevented. Where are your companions, your old companions? You sat in the pothouse with them; they are in hell, but you are not. When you were younger you sinned with them, and they are lost, but you are not. Why this difference made? Why are they cast away and you spared? I can only ascribe it to the gracious longsuffering of Jehovah. O, I pray you look at him who spared you, and weep and mourn for your sin. May the Spirit of God come down on you this morning and draw you to the foot of his dear cross, and as you see the blood which has spared your blood, and the death which has made you live until now, I do trust that the divine Spirit may make you fall down and say, "O Jesus, how can I offend thee? How can I stand out against thee? Accept me and save me for thy mercy's sake." For while I have thus spoken of the general interest which Christ has in you all, I have good hope that Christ has

a special interest in some of you; I hope that he has specially redeemed you from among men, and bought you not with silver and gold, but with his own precious blood, having loved you with an everlasting love, I trust he intends with the bands of his kindness to draw you this morning. "Oh," says one, "I cannot think that such can be the case." But suppose you were to find out ere long that you were chosen of God, and dear to Christ, and were to be a jewel in his crown for ever, what would you say then of yourself? "I would mourn that I could ever have hated him that loved me so well. Oh! that I could ever have stood out against him that was determined to save me! What a fool I was to quarrel with him who had paid my price, and chosen me by his grace, and taken me to be married unto himself for ever!" I tell you that God will forgive you, but you will never forgive yourselves for having stood out and resisted so long. Oh! may eternal mercy, which has not yet said, "Cut it down," now dig about you and dung you, that you may bring forth fruit, and then it shall be all to the praise of him whose precious blood has saved us from eternal wrath. May God bless these feeble words of mine. He knows how I meant them; how I meant to speak them, how I meant to have wept over you, how I wanted that my soul should heave with passionate desire for your conversion; but if there have been no such outward manifestations, yet I pray God that the truth itself may be irresistible, and may he get to himself the victory, and his shall be the praise, evermore.

"This Year Also"

"This year also"—Luke xiii. 8.

AT the opening of another year, and at the commencement of another volume of sermons, we earnestly desire to utter the word of exhortation: but alas, at this present, the preacher is a prisoner, and must speak from his pillow instead of his pulpit. Let not the few words which we can put together come with diminished power from a sick man, for the musket fired by a wounded soldier sends forth the bullet with none the less force. Our desire is to speak with living words, or not at all. He who enables us to sit up and compose these trembling sentences is entreated to clothe them with his Spirit, that they may be according to his own mind.

The interceding vine-dresser pleaded for the fruitless fig-tree, "let it alone *this year also*," dating as it were a year from the time wherein he spoke. Trees and fruitbearing plants have a natural measurement for their lives: evidently a year came to its close when it was time to seek fruit on the fig-tree, and another year commenced when the vine-dresser began again his digging and pruning work. Men are such barren things that their fruitage marks no certain periods, and it becomes needful to make artificial divisions of time for them; there seems to be no set period for man's spiritual harvest or vintage, or if there be, the sheaves and the clusters come not in their season, and hence we have to say one to another,—"This shall be the beginning of a new year." Be it so, then. Let us congratulate each other upon seeing the dawn of "this year also," and let us unitedly pray that we may enter upon it, continue in it, and come to its close under the unfailing blessing of the Lord to whom all years belong.

I. The beginning of a new year SUGGESTS A RETROSPECT. Let us take it, deliberately and honestly. "*This year also:*"—then there had been former years of grace. The dresser of the vineyard was not for the first time aware of the fig-tree's failure, neither had the owner come for the first time seeking figs in vain. God, who gives us "this year also," has given us others before it; his sparing mercy is no novelty, his patience has already

been taxed by our provocations. First came our *youthful* years, when even a little fruit unto God is peculiarly sweet to him. How did we spend them? Did our strength run all into wild wood and wanton branch? If so, we may well bewail that wasted vigour, that life misspent, that sin exceedingly multiplied. He who saw us misuse those golden months of youth nevertheless affords us "this year also," and we should enter upon it with a holy jealousy, lest what of strength and ardour may be left to us should be allowed to run away into the same wasteful courses as aforetime. Upon the heels of our youthful years came those of *early manhood*, when we began to muster a household, and to become as a tree fixed in its place; then also fruit would have been precious. Did we bear any? Did we present unto the Lord a basket of summer fruit? Did we offer him the firstling of our strength? If we did so, we may well adore the grace which so early saved us; but if not, the past chides us, and, lifting an admonitory finger, it warns us not to let "this year also" follow the way of the rest of our lives. He who has wasted youth and the morning of manhood has surely had enough of fooling: the time past may well suffice him to have wrought the will of the flesh: it will be a superfluity of naughtiness to suffer "this year also" to be trodden down in the service of sin. Many of us are now in the *prime of life*, and our years already spent are not few. Have we still need to confess that our years are eaten up by the grasshopper and the canker-worm? Have we reached the half-way house, and still know not whither we are going? Are we fools at forty? Are we half a century old by the calendar and yet far off from years of discretion? Alas, great God, that there should be men past this age who are still without knowledge! Unsaved at sixty, unregenerate at seventy, unawakened at eighty, unrenewed at ninety! These are each and all startling. Yet, peradventure, they will each one fall upon ears which they should make to tingle, but they will hear them as though they heard them not. Continuance in evil breeds callousness of heart, and when the soul has long been sleeping in indifference it is hard to arouse it from the deadly slumber.

The sound of the words "this year also" makes some of us remember *years of great mercy*, sparkling and flashing with delight. Were those years laid at the Lord's feet? They were comparable to the silver bells upon the horses—were they "holiness unto the Lord"? If not, how shall we answer for it if "this year also" should be musical with merry mercy and yet be spent in the ways of carelessness? The same words recall to some of us our *years of sharp affliction* when we were, indeed, digged about and dunged. How went those years? God was doing great things for us, exercising careful and expensive husbandry, caring for us with exceeding great and wise care,—did we render according to the benefit received? Did we rise from the bed more patient and gentle, weaned from the world, and welded to Christ? Did we bring forth clusters to reward the dresser of the vineyard? Let us not refuse these questions of self-examination, for it may be this is to be another of these years of captivity, another season of the furnace and the fining-pot. The Lord grant that the coming tribulation may take more chaff out of us than any of its predecessors, and leave the wheat cleaner and better.

The new year also reminds us of *opportunities for usefulness*, which

have come and gone, and of *unfulfilled resolutions* which have blossomed only to fade; shall "this year also" be as those which have gone before? May we not hope for grace to advance upon grace already gained, and should we not seek for power to turn our poor sickly promises into robust action?

Looking back on the past we lament the follies by which we would not willingly be held captive "this year also," and we adore the forgiving mercy, the preserving providence, the boundless liberality, the divine love, of which we hope to be partakers "this year also."

II. If the preacher could think freely he could wherry the text at his pleasure in many directions, but he is feeble, and so must let it drive with the current which bears it on to a second consideration: the text MENTIONS A MERCY. It was in great goodness that the tree which cumbered the soil was allowed to stand for another year, and prolonged life should always be regarded as a boon of mercy. We must view "this year also" as a grant from infinite grace. It is wrong to speak as if we cared nothing for life, and looked upon our being here as an evil or a punishment; we are here "this year also" as the result of love's pleadings, and in pursuance of love's designs.

The wicked man should count that the Lord's longsuffering points to his salvation, and he should permit the cords of love to draw him to it. O that the Holy Spirit would make the blasphemer, the Sabbath-breaker, and the openly vicious to feel what a wonder it is that their lives are prolonged "this year also"! Are they spared to curse, and riot, and defy their Maker? Shall this be the only fruit of patient mercy? The procrastinator who has put off the messenger of heaven with his delays and half promises, ought he not to wonder that he is allowed to see "this year also"? How is it that the Lord has borne with him and put up with his vacillations and hesitations? Is this year of grace to be spent in the same manner? Transient impressions, hasty resolves, and speedy apostasies—are these to be the weary story over and over again? The startled conscience, the tyrant passion, the smothered emotion! Are these to be the tokens of yet another year? May God forbid that any one of us should hesitate and delay through "this year also." Infinite pity holds back the axe of justice, shall it be insulted by the repetition of the sins which caused the uplifting of the instrument of wrath? What can be more tantalizing to the heart of goodness than indecision? Well might the Lord's prophet become impatient and cry, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" Well may God himself push for a decision and demand an immediate reply. O undecided soul, wilt thou swing much longer between heaven and hell, and act as if it were hard to choose between the slavery of Satan and the liberty of the Great Father's home of love? "This year also" wilt thou sport in defiance of justice, and pervert the generosity of mercy into a licence for still further rebellion? "This year also" must divine love be made an occasion for continued sin? O do not act so basely, so contrary to every noble instinct, so injuriously to thine own best interests.

The believer is kept out of heaven "this year also" in love, and not in anger. There are some for whose sake it is needful he should abide in the flesh, some to be helped by him on their heavenward way, and others to be led to the Redeemer's feet by his instruction. The heaven of many saints is not yet prepared for them, because their nearest companions

have not yet arrived, and their spiritual children have not yet gathered in glory in sufficient number to give them a thoroughly heavenly welcome: they must wait "this year also" that their rest may be the more glorious, and that the sheaves which they will bring with them may afford them greater joy. Surely, for the sake of souls, for the delight of glorifying our Lord, and for the increase of the jewels of our crown, we may be glad to wait below "this year also." This is a wide field, but we may not linger in it, for our space is little, and our strength is even less.

III. Our last feeble utterance shall remind you that the expression, "This year also," IMPLIES A LIMIT. The vine-dresser asked no longer a reprieve than one year. If his digging and manuring should not then prove successful he would plead no more, but the tree should fall. Even when Jesus is the pleader, the request of mercy has its bounds and times. It is not for ever that we shall be let alone, and allowed to cumber the ground; if we will not repent we must perish, if we will not be benefited by the spade we must fall by the axe.

There will come a last year to each one of us: therefore let each one say to himself—Is this my last? If it should be the last with the preacher, he would gird up his loins to deliver the Lord's message with all his soul, and bid his fellow-men be reconciled to God. Dear friend, is "this year also" to be *your* last? Are you ready to see the curtain rise upon eternity? Are you now prepared to hear the midnight cry, and to enter into the marriage supper? The judgment and all that will follow upon it are most surely the heritage of every living man, blessed are they who by faith in Jesus are able to face the bar of God without a thought of terror.

If we live to be counted among the oldest inhabitants we must depart at last: there must be an end, and the voice must be heard—"Thus saith the Lord, this year thou shalt die." So many have gone before us, and are going every hour, that no man should need any other *memento mori*, and yet man is so eager to forget his own mortality, and thereby to forfeit his hopes of bliss, that we cannot too often bring it before the mind's eye. O mortal man, bethink thee! Prepare to meet thy God; for thou must meet him. Seek the Saviour, yea, seek him ere another sun sinks to his rest.

Once more, "this year also," and it may be for this year only, the cross is uplifted as the pharos of the world, the one light to which no eye can look in vain. Oh that millions would look that way and live. Soon the Lord Jesus will come a second time, and then the blaze of his throne will supplant the mild radiance of his cross: the Judge will be seen rather than the Redeemer. Now he saves, but then he will destroy. Let us hear his voice at this moment. He hath limited a day, let us be eager to avail ourselves of the gracious season. Let us believe in Jesus this day, seeing it may be our last. These are the pleadings of one who now falls back on his pillow in very weakness. Hear them for your souls' sakes and live.

All Things Are Ready. Come.

"Come, for all things are now ready"—Luke xiv. 17.

THIS invitation was first of all made to the Jews, but it seems to me to have a peculiar appropriateness to ourselves. It is later in the day than when first the Lord was here, and therefore the supper time is evidently closer at hand. The shadows lengthen, the sun of the present dispensation is nearing its setting; by nearly nineteen hundred years has its day been shortened since first the Lord sent forth his servants at supper time. The fulness of time for the marriage supper of the Lamb must speedily arrive, and therefore it behoves us to be more than ever earnest in delivering the message to the invited guests.

And if all things could be said to be ready even in our Saviour's day, we may say it with still greater emphasis now; for when he delivered this parable the Holy Spirit was not yet given, but Pentecost has now passed, and the Spirit of God abideth with us to accompany the word, to fill it with power and to bless our souls as we feed upon the truth. Very emphatically then at this time all things are now ready, and the supper awaits the guests. I pray you do not begin to make excuses, but be prepared to follow us when we bid you come, to go with us when we seek to bring you in, or at least to yield to our entreaties when with all the sacred violence of love we would compel you to come in. We will not grudge the use of all the three increasing modes of persuasion so long as you are but led to "Come, for all things are now ready."

There are two things clearly in the text, and these have a close relation to one another. A plain invitation—"Come," and then a forcible argument—"for all things are ready." The argument is fetched from the divine preparations, gathered from among the dainty viands of the royal feast. "My oxen and my fatlings are killed, come to the supper." The readiness of everything on God's part is the argument why men should come and partake of his grace: and that is the point upon which

we will dwell at this time—the readiness of the feast of mercy is the reason why men should come to it at once.

I. We will begin our meditation by laying down the first statement which shall make our first division of discourse, namely, that IT IS GOD'S HABIT TO HAVE ALL THINGS READY, whether for his guests or his creatures. You never discover him to be behindhand in anything. When the guests come there is not a scramble to get the table arranged and the food prepared, but the Lord has great forethought, and every little point of detail is well arranged. "All things are ready."

It was so in creation. He did not create a single blade of grass upon the face of the earth until the soil and the atmosphere had been prepared for it, and until the kindly sun had learned to look down upon the earth. Imagine vegetation without a sun, or without the alternation of day and night. But the air was full of light, the firmament upheld the clouds, and the dry land had appeared from out of the sea, and then all things were ready for herb, and plant, and tree. Nor did God prepare one single creature that hath life, nor fowl that fly in the midst of heaven, nor fish that swim the seas, nor beast that moveth on the dry land, until he had prepared its *habitat*, and made ready its appointed food. There were no cattle before there were meadows for their grazing; no birds till there were trees for their nests, no, nor even a creeping insect till its portion of meat had been provided. No creature had to wait in hungry mood while its food was growing; all things were ready: ready first for vegetation, and then afterwards for animal life. As for Adam, when God came to make him as his last and noblest work of creation, all things were ready. The garden was laid out upon the banks of flowing streams, and planted with all kinds of trees, the fruits were ripe for his diet, and the flowers in bloom for his delight. He did not come to an unfurnished house, but he entered upon a home which his Father had made pleasant and agreeable for his dwelling. The world was first fitted up, and then the man who was to govern that world was placed in it. "All things are ready," the Lord seems to say, "Spring up, O herb yielding seed"; and then "All things are ready, come forth ye roes and hinds of the field!" and then "All things are ready, stand forth, O man, made in mine own image!"

In after times we may gather illustrations of the same truth from the ways of God with men. The ark was first of all builded, and the various creatures were gathered into it, with all their necessary provender, for that strange voyage which they were about to take: and then the Lord said to Noah, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark," "All things are ready, come," was his voice to the chosen eight as they entered into the ark. There was no need to tarry any longer, every preparation was made, and therefore God shut them in. Everything is done with punctuality and exactness by the only wise God. The selfsame day that a thing is needed it is prepared.

Take another event in providence, such as the going down of Israel into Egypt. God had determined that Jacob and his seed should sojourn awhile in the land of Ham, but how wisely he prepared the whole matter. He sent a man before them, even Joseph, and Joseph was there upon the throne clothed with power to nourish them through the famine. He had been there years before, all in good time to store the wheat

while the seven years of plenty lasted, that they might be well fed during the seven years of famine. Goshen also was at the disposal of Joseph, so that the flocks and herds of Israel might dwell in that fat land. Not into Egypt shall God's Israel go till all things are ready; and when all things are ready they will come out again with a high hand and an outstretched arm.

So was it when the tribes migrated into Canaan itself. God took them not to the promised land until all things were ready. They were made to wait for the fitting time, for the Lord said "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Not till the inhabitants of the land had passed the bounds of mercy, and were condemned to die, were the Israelites brought upon the scene to be at once their executioners and successors; and when the tribes came to the river Jordan, God had prepared everything for them, for he had sent the hornet before them to drive out the people, and a pestilence also, for the spies said, "It is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof." The Lord God had gone before them to fight their battles before they came, and to prepare a place for them, so that when they entered they dwelt in houses which they had not built, and they gathered the fruit of olives which they had not planted. They came to a land that flowed with milk and honey, a land in a fine cultivated condition, and not a wilderness which with hard labour must be reclaimed. Israel came to a country which was as the garden of the Lord, whose fruit might at once be enjoyed, for they ate of the old corn of the land almost as soon as they passed the Jordan. So you see "All things are ready" is a proclamation which the Lord has often in spirit made to those whom he chooses to bless.

Now the fact that in the great gospel supper all things are ready teaches us first, that *God's thoughts go before men's comings*. "Come, *for* all things are ready." Not "If you come, all things will be ready," but "they are ready, and therefore come." Grace is first, and man at his best follows its footsteps. Long before we ever thought of God he thought of us; yea, before we had a being and ere time itself began, in the bosom of the Eternal there were thoughts of love towards those for whom the table of his mercy is now spread. He had planned and arranged everything in his august mind from of old, he had indeed foreknown and predestinated all the provisions and all the guests of his supper; all things were settled in his eternal covenant and purpose or ever the earth was. Never think, oh sinner, that thou canst outstrip the love of God, it is at the end of the race before thou art at the beginning. God hath completed before thou hast begun. His thoughts are before ours, and *so are his acts*, for he doth not say, "All things are planned and arranged," but "All things are ready." Jesus, the great sacrifice, is slain, the fountain for our cleansing is filled with blood: the Holy Spirit has been given, the word by which we are to be instructed is in our hands, and the light which will illuminate that sacred page is promised us through the Holy Ghost. Things promised ought to encourage us to come to Christ, but things already given ought to be irresistible attractions. All things are already completed by the sacred Trinity before we come to cry for mercy; this should make us very hopeful and eager in our approaches to the Lord. Come, sinner;

come at once: this ought to encourage thee, since all that God has to do in thy salvation is done before thou hast a thought of him or turnest one foot towards his abode. All things are ready. Come!

This also proves how welcome those are who come. If you are invited to see a friend, and when you reach the place you find the door fast, and after knocking many times no one answers, for there is no one at home, you reckon that there is some mistake, or that the invitation was not a sincere one. Even if your host should come to the door and admit you, but should evidently be embarrassed, for there is no meal provided, and he has made no arrangements for your rest at night, you soon detect it, and like a wise man you quickly move off somewhere else, for if you had been welcome, things would have been prepared for you. But oh, poor soul, if thou comest to God all things are ready for thine entertainment.

> "Spread for thee the festal board,
> With his richest dainties stored."

The couch of rest and quietness is prepared for thee. All things are ready. How freely doth Jehovah welcome thee, how genuine is the invitation, how sincere the desire that thou shouldst come to feast with him.

So much upon our first remark, it is the habit of the Lord to have all things ready for his guests.

II. Our second statement is that THIS READINESS SHOULD BE AN ARGUMENT THAT HIS SAINTS SHOULD COME continually to him and find grace to help in every time of need. O children of God, I will lift the parable away from the immediate use which the Saviour made of it to employ it for your good. You know, beloved, that whenever the Lord Jesus Christ invites his people to come to him, and to taste of his bounty, all things are ready. It was a beautiful scene by the sea of Tiberias when the Lord spake to those who had been toiling on the lake at fishing, and said to them, "Come and dine." They were willing enough to dine, but they were busy dragging to the shore those great fishes. Remember, when they did land, they found the invitation to be no vain one, for it is written, "They saw a fire of coals there and fish laid thereon, and bread." How the coals came there, and the fish, and the bread, the evangelist does not tell us, but our Lord would not have asked them to dinner if he had not been able to give them a warm reception; there was the fire of coals, and the fish laid thereon and bread. Whenever therefore your Lord and Master, by his blessed Spirit, calls you to come near to him, you may be quite sure that all things are ready for your immediate enjoyment: you need never pause or hesitate, but approach him without delay. I want to caution you against replying, "But, Lord, I do not feel ready." That is most true, but that is not an argument which thou shouldst use to excuse thyself in holding back. It is *his* readiness that is the main thing, not thine, and as all things are ready, do thou come whether thou feelest ready or not. I have heard of some Christians who have said, "I do not feel in a proper frame of mind to pray." My brother, pray till you do. Some have said, "I do not think I shall go up to the house of God to-day, I feel so unhappy, so cast down." When shouldst

thou go so much as then, in order that thou mayest find comfort? "Still," saith one, "you would not have me sing a hymn when of heavy heart?" Ay, would I not, I would indeed, I would have thee sing thyself up from the depths of the sea where all God's billows have gone over thee. David full often did so, when he began a psalm, in the deeps, and then gradually rose, and rose, and rose, till he was in a perfect rapture of delight before the psalm was over. All things are ready with your Lord, therefore do you come whether you happen to be ready or not.

Note the times when this truth ought to have power with you. All things are ready, therefore come to *the storehouse of divine promise.* Are you in spiritual poverty? Come and take what God has provided for you, for all things are yours, and all the blessings of the everlasting hills belong to all the people of God. Are you needing strength? There is a promise, "As thy days so shall thy strength be." It is ready, come and take it. Art thou wanting consolation? Dost thou not know that all things are ready for thy comfort, that two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, are already set before thee? Come thou, and take thy solace. Ay, remember that all that God has promised belongs to all those who believe the promise, and that you may therefore come at all times, however deep your need, and if you have but faith you shall find the special supply for the special want. All things are ready, therefore come with holy confidence, and take what is ripe enough to gather, ripe for you.

Come next to *the mercy seat* in prayer, all things are ready there. The mercy seat is sprinkled with the precious blood of Christ. The veil also is rent in twain, and from between the cherubim Jehovah's glory now shines forth with mildest radiance. Let us therefore come with boldness unto the throne of the heavenly grace, because everything there is ready for the pleading suppliant. Thou hast no need to bring anything with thee there. Thou hast no need of making preparations other than the Holy Spirit waits to give thee in the form of groanings which cannot be uttered. Come, child of God, notwithstanding thy carelessness and indifference, or whatever it may be thou hast to complain of, for though thou be unready, the throne of grace is ready, and therefore do thou draw near to it and find the grace thou needest.

If at this time we feel strong promptings towards *communion* with Christ what a blessing it is that Christ is always ready to commune with his people. "Behold," saith he, "I stand at the door and knock." We think that *we* stand at the door and knock, but it is scarcely so, the greater truth with regard to his people is that Jesus asks for fellowship with us, and tells us that if we open the door, and that is all he bids his people do, he will enter in and sup with them, and they with him. Suppose there is no supper, he will provide it—he hath all things ready. The Master saith, "Where is the guest-chamber?" He doth not say "Where is the feast?" If thy heart will be the guest-chamber, he will provide the supper, and thou shalt sup with him and he with thee. At whose door did Christ knock according to the Scriptures? It was at the door of the Laodicean church, at the door of the very church concerning which he had said, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Therefore thou poor Laodicean believer that art here this morning, if thou hast

any promptings towards Christ, arise, for all things are ready, and or ever thou art aware thy soul shall be as the chariots of Amminadib. He is ready to receive us to his heart of hearts. How sweetly this ought to constrain us to fly into the arms of Jesus.

I think the same thought ought to cross our minds with regard to *every daily duty*. We wake up in the morning, but we do not know exactly what lies before us, for God's providence has constantly new revelations: but I like to think in the morning that all things are ready for my pathway through the day, that if I will go out to serve God in my ministry he has prepared some ear into which I am to drop a gracious word, and some heart in the furrows of which I shall sow some blessed seed effectually. Behold all providence with its mighty wheels is co-working with the servant of the living God; only go forward in zeal and confidence, my brother, and thou shalt find that every step of thy way is ready for thee. Thy Master has trodden the road and marked out for thee the houses of refreshment where thou art to tarry till thou shalt come to the celestial city itself, and the hallowed spots where thou shalt bring glory to his blessed name. For a useful life all things are ready for us.

Yes, and if beyond the daily service of life we should feel a prompting to aspire to *a higher degree of holiness*, if we want to grow in grace and reach the fulness of the stature of a man in Christ Jesus, all things are ready for us. No Christian can have a sacred ambition after holiness which the Lord is not prepared to fulfil. Thou that willest to be like thy Master, thou that desirest to make a self-sacrifice that will show the power of his grace in thee, the Holy Spirit waits to help thee, all things shall work for thee, for all things are ready. Come therefore without fear.

One of these days it may be that you and I shall either be grown very old, or else disease will lay hold upon us, and we shall lie upon the sick bed watching and waiting for our Master's coming. Then there shall suddenly appear a messenger from him, who will bring us this word, "All things are ready, come unto the supper," and closing our eyes on earth we shall open them in heaven and see what he has done who so sweetly said, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Oh, it will be a joyous moment when we shall hear the summons, "All things are ready, quit thy house of clay, thy farm, thy merchandise, and even her who lies in thy bosom, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and thou must be there; therefore, rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. The winter is over and past, the time of the singing of birds is come for thee, all things are ready, come!" I feel tempted to linger here, but I must tear myself away from that point to pass on to the next.

III. THE PERFECT READINESS OF THE FEAST OF DIVINE MERCY IS EVIDENTLY INTENDED TO BE A STRONG ARGUMENT WITH SINNERS WHY THEY SHOULD COME AT ONCE. To the sinner, then, do I address myself.

Soul, dost thou desire eternal life? Is there within thy spirit a hungering and a thirsting after such things as may satisfy thy spirit and make thee live for ever? Then hearken while the Master's servant gives

thee the invitation. "Come, for *all things* are ready,"—all, not some, but all. There is nothing that thou canst need between here and heaven but what is provided in Jesus Christ, in his person and in his work. All things are ready, life for thy death, forgiveness for thy sin, cleansing for thy filth, clothing for thy nakedness, joy for thy sorrow, strength for thy weakness, yea, more than all that ever thou canst want is stored up in the boundless nature and work of Christ. Thou must not say, "I cannot come because I have not this, or have not that." Art thou to prepare the feast? Art thou to provide anything? Art thou the purveyor of even so much as the salt or the water? Thou knowest not thy true condition, or thou wouldst not dream of such a thing. The great Householder himself has provided the whole of the feast, thou hast nothing to do with the provision but to partake of it. If thou lackest come and take what thou lackest; the greater thy need the greater reason why thou shouldst come where all things that thy need can possibly want will be at once supplied. If thou be so needy that thou hast nothing good at all about thee, all things are ready. What wouldst thou provide more when God has provided all things? Superfluity of naughtiness would it be if thou wert to think of adding to his "all things"; it would be but a presumptuous competing with the provisions of the great King, and this he will not endure. All that thou wantest—I can but repeat the words—between the gates of hell, where thou now liest, and the gates of heaven, to which grace will bring thee if thou believest,—all is provided and prepared in Jesus Christ the Saviour.

And all things are *ready*, dwell on that word. The oxen and the fatlings were killed; what is more, they were prepared to be eaten, they were ready to be feasted on, they smoked on the board. It is something when the king gives orders for the slaughter of so many bullocks for the feast, but the feast is not ready then; and when beneath the poleaxe the victims fall, and they are stripped and hung up ready for the fire, there is something done, but they are not ready. It is when the joints are served hot and steaming upon the table, and all that is wanted is brought forth and laid in proper order for the banquet, it is then that all things are ready, and this is the case now; at this very moment thou wilt find the feast to be in the best possible condition; it was never better and never can be better than it is now. All things are ready, just in the exact condition that thou needest them to be, just in such condition as shall be best for thy soul's comfort and enjoyment. All things are ready; nothing needs to be further mellowed or sweetened, everything is at the best that eternal love can make it.

But notice the word, "now," "All things are *now* ready"—just now, at this moment. At feasts, you know, the good housewife is often troubled if the guests come late. She would be sorry if they came half-an-hour too soon, but half-an-hour too late spoils everything, and in what a state of fret and worry she is if when all things are *now* ready, her friends still delay. Leave food at the fire awhile, and it does not seem to be "now ready," but something more than ready, and even spoiled. So doth the great householder lay stress upon this, all things are *now* ready, therefore come at once. He saith not that if thou wilt tarry for another seven years all things will then be ready: God grant that long before

that space of time thou mayest have got beyond the needs of persuasion by having become a taster of the feast, but he doth say that they are all ready now, just now. Just now that your heart is so heavy and your mind is so careless, that your spirit is so wandering—all things are ready now. Just now, though you have never thought of these things before, but dropped in this morning to see this large assembly with no motive whatever as to your own salvation, yet all things are ready *now*. Though your sins are as the stars of heaven, and your soul trembles under an awful foreboding of coming judgment, yet "all things are now ready." After all your rejections of Christ, after the many invitations that have been thrown away upon you, come ye to the supper.

And if they are ready *now*, the argument is come *now*, while still all things are ready. While the Spirit lingers and still doth strive with men, while mercy's gates still stand wide open, that "whosoever will may come," while life and health and reason still are spared to you and the ministering voice that bids thee come can still be heard, come now, come at once—all things are ready—come! Delay is as unreasonable as it is wicked now that all things are ready.

Notice that all things were ready for those who were bidden. They did not come, but they were not mocked when they were bidden to come. The fact of all things being ready proved that the invitation was a sincere one, although it was a rejected one. There are some who will not have us give an invitation to any but to those whom we believe are sure to come, nay, in a measure have come; that is to say, they make a minister to be a mere superfluity. Why need he come and invite those who have already begun to come? But we believe it to be our duty and our privilege to invite the whole mass of mankind; and even those who will not come: if we knew they would not come we should not therefore exempt them from the bidding, for the servant was sent to bid them to the wedding who nevertheless all with one consent began to make excuse. They were invited, and earnestly invited, and all things were ready, though they came not. O my dear hearers, if you do not come to Christ you will perish, but you will never be able to say you were not bidden, and that there was nothing ready for you. No, there stands the feast all spread, and you are sincerely and honestly bidden to come. God grant that you may come, and come at once.

IV. Now I am going to pass on to my fourth and last point, which may God bless to the comfort of some seeking soul. THIS TEXT DISPOSES OF A GREAT DEAL OF TALK ABOUT THE SINNER'S READINESS OR UNREADINESS: because, if the reason why a sinner is to come is because all things are ready, then it is idle for him to say "But I am not ready." It is clear that all the readiness required on man's part is a willingness to come and receive the blessing which God had provided. There is nothing else necessary; if men are willing to come, they may come, they will come. Where the Lord has been pleased to touch the will so that man has a desire towards Christ, where the heart really hungers and thirsts after righteousness, that is all the readiness which is wanted. All the fitness he requireth is that first you feel your need of him (and that he gives you), and that secondly in feeling

your need of him you are willing to come to him. Willingness to come is everything. A readiness to believe in Jesus, a willingness to cast the soul on him, a preparedness to accept him just as he is, because you feel that he is just the Saviour that you need—that is all: there was no other readiness, there could have been none, in the case of those who were poor and blind, and halt, and maimed, yet came to the feast. The text does not say, "You are ready, therefore come," that is a legal way of putting the gospel; but it says, "All things are ready, the gospel is ready, therefore you are to come." As for *your* readiness, all the readiness that is possibly wanted is a readiness which the Spirit gives us, namely, willingness to come to Jesus.

Now notice that the unreadiness of those who were bidden arose out of their possessions and out of their abilities. One would not come because he had bought a piece of land. What a great heap Satan casts up between the soul and the Saviour! What with worldly possessions and good deeds he builds an earthwork of huge dimensions between the sinner and his Lord. Some gentlemen have too many acres ever to come to Christ: they think too much of the world to think much of him. Many have too many fields of good works in which there are growing crops in which they pride themselves, and these cause them to feel that they are persons of great importance. Many a man cannot come to Christ for all things because he has so much already. Others of them could not come because they had so much to do, and could do it well—one had bought five yoke of oxen, he was going to prove them; a strong man quite able for ploughing; the reason why he did not come was because he had so much ability. Thousands are kept away from grace by what they have and by what they can do. Emptiness is more preparatory to a feast than fulness. How often does it happen that poverty and inability even help to lead the soul to Christ. When a man thinketh himself to be rich he will not come to the Saviour. When a man dreameth that he is able at any time to repent and believe, and to do everything for himself that is wanted, he is not likely to come and by a simple faith repose in Christ. It is not what you have not but what you have that keeps many of you from Christ. Sinful self is a devil, but righteous self is seven devils. The man who feels himself guilty may for awhile be kept away by his guilt, but the man who is self-righteous will never come: until the Lord has taken his pride away from him he will still refuse the feast of free grace. The possession of abilities and honours and riches keep men from coming to the Redeemer.

But on the other hand personal condition does not constitute an unfitness for coming to Christ, for the sad condition of those who became guests did not debar them from the supper. Some were *poor*, and doubtless wretched and ragged; they had not a penny to bless themselves with, as we say; their garments were tattered, perhaps worse, they were filthy, they were not fit to be near respectable people, they would certainly be no credit to my lord's table; but those who went to bring them in did not search their pockets, nor look at their coats, but they fetched them in. They were poor, but the messengers were told to bring in the poor, and therefore brought them. Their poverty did not prevent their being ready; and oh, poor soul, if thou be poor literally, or

poor spiritually, neither sort of poverty can constitute an unfitness for divine mercy.

"The poorer the wretch the welcomer here."

If thou art brought to thy last penny, yea, if that is spent, and if thou hast pawned all, and thou art left in debt over head and ears, and thinkest that there is nothing for thee but to be laid by the heels in prison for ever, nevertheless thou mayest come, poverty and all.

Another class of them were *maimed*, and so were not very comely in appearance: an arm had been lopped off, or an eye had been gouged out. One had lost a nose, and another a leg. They were in all stages and shapes of dismemberment. Sometimes we turn our heads away, and feel that we would rather give anything than look upon beggars who show their wounds, and describe how they were maimed. But it did not matter how badly they were disfigured; they were brought in, and not one of them was repulsed because of the ugly cuts he had received. So, poor soul, however Satan may have torn and lopped thee, and into whatsoever condition he may have brought thee, so that thou feelest ashamed to live, nevertheless this is no unfitness for coming; just as thou art thou mayest come to his table of grace. Moral disfigurements are soon rectified when Jesus takes the character in hand. Come thou to him, however sadly thou art injured by sin.

There were others who were *halt*, that is to say, they had lost a leg, or it was of no use to them, and they could not come except they had a crutch and crawled or hopped upon it; but nevertheless that was no reason why they were not welcome. Ah, if you find it difficult to believe, it is no reason why you should not come and receive the grand absolution which Jesus Christ is ready to bestow upon you. Lame with doubting and distrusting, nevertheless come to the supper and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Others were *blind* people, and when they were told to come they could not see the way, but in that case the messenger was not told to tell them to come, he was commanded to bring them, and a blind man can come if he is brought. All that was wanted was willingness to be led by the hand in the right direction. Now you that cannot fully understand the gospel as you desire to do, that are puzzled and muddled, give your hand into the hand of Jesus, and be willing to be led, be willing to believe what you cannot comprehend, and to grasp in confidence that which you are not able yet to measure with your understanding. The blind, however ignorant or uninstructed they are, shall not be kept away because of that.

Then there were the men in the *highways*, I suppose they were beggars; and the men in the *hedges*, I suppose they were hiding, and were probably thieves; but nevertheless they were told to come, and though

they were highwaymen and hedge-birds even that did not prevent their coming and finding welcome. Though outcasts, offcasts, spiritual gipsies, people that nobody cared for, yet, whatever they might be, that was not the question, they were to come because all things were ready: come in rags, come in filth, come maimed, come covered with sores, come in all sorts of filthiness and abomination, yet because all things are ready they were to be brought or to be compelled to come in.

Now, lastly, I think it was the very thing, which in any one of these people looked like unfitness, which was a help to them. It is a great truth that what we regard as unfitness is often our truest fitness. I want you to notice these poor, blind, and halt people. Some of those who were invited would not come because they had bought some land, or five yoke of oxen, but when the messenger went up to the poor man in rags and said, "Come to the supper," it is quite clear he would not say he had bought a field, or oxen, for he could not do it, he had not a penny to do the thing with, so that he was clean delivered from that temptation. And when a man is invited to come to Christ and he says, "I do not want him, I have a righteousness of my own," he will stay away; but when the Lord Jesus came along to me I never was tempted in that way, because I had no righteousness of my own, and could not have made one if I had tried. I know some here who could not patch up a garment of righteousness if they were to put all their rags together, and this is a great help to their receiving the Lord Jesus. What a blessedness it is to have such a sense of soul poverty that you will never stay away from Christ because of what you possess.

Then, next, some could not come because they had married a wife. Now, I think it is very likely that these people who were maimed and cut about were so injured that they had no wife, and perhaps could not get anybody to have them. Well then, they had not that temptation, to stay away. They were too maimed to attract the eye of anybody who was looking for beauty, and therefore they were not tempted that way. But they found at the ever-blessed supper of the Lamb an everlasting wedlock, which was infinitely better. Thus do souls lose earthly joys and comforts, and by the loss they gain supremely: they are thus made willing to close in with Christ and find a higher comfort and a higher joy. That maiming which looked like unfitness turned out to be fitness.

One excuse made was, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." The halt could not do that. When the messenger touched the lame man on the shoulder and said "Come," he could not say, "I am going out to-night to plough with my new teams." He had never been over the clods ever since he had lost his leg, poor soul, so that he could not make such an excuse. The blind man could not say, "I have bought a piece of land and I must go to see it;" he was free

from all the lusts of the eye, and so far was all the more ready to be led to the supper. When a soul feels its own sinfulness, and wretchedness, and lost estate, it thinks itself unfit to come to Christ, but this is an assistance to it, since it prevents its looking to anything else but Christ, kills its excuses, and makes it free to accept salvation by grace.

But how about the men that were in the highway? Well, it seems to me that they were already on the road, and at least out of their houses, if they had any. If they were out there begging, they were the more ready to accept an invitation to a meal of victuals, for it was that they were singing for. A man who is out of the house of his own self-righteousness, though he be a great sinner, is in a more favourable position and more likely to come to Christ than he who prides himself in his supposed self-righteousness.

As for those who were under the hedges, well, they had no house of their own, and so they were all the more likely to come and fill God's house. Men do not take to hedges to sleep under them as long as they have even a hovel where they may rest their head, but oh, poor soul, when thou art driven to such distress that thou wouldst fain hide under any hedge, when thou hast nothing left thee but a fearful looking for of judgment, when thou thinkest thyself to be an outlaw and an outcast before God, left to wander like Cain, a wait and stray, lost to all good, thou art the very man to come to Christ. Come out of your hedges, then. I am looking for you. Though you hide yourselves away yet God's own Spirit will discover you, and bring you, I trust this very morning, to feed on love divine. Trust Jesus Christ, that is all, just as you are, with all your unfitness and unreadiness. Take what God has made ready for you, the precious blood to cleanse you, a robe of righteousness to cover you, eternal joy to be your portion. Receive the grace of God in Christ Jesus, oh receive it now. God grant you may, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

A Bad Excuse Is Worse Than None

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse."—Luke xiv. 18.

THE provisions of the gospel of Christ may well be compared to a *supper*, provided, as they were, in the evening of the world—"in these last days." The description, "*a great supper*," is well borne out if we consider the greatness of the provision; how much of love and mercy God has displayed towards the sons of men in the person of Christ Jesus; how much of power and of gracious working he has shown by his Holy Spirit. A great supper it is if we think of the richness and sweetness of the provision—it is a feast worthy of the great King. The flesh of Jesus is our spiritual meat, and his blood our choicest wine. Our souls are satisfied with covenant mercies, most fitly set forth as "A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." A great supper it is, moreover, when we consider the number of guests invited. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The call of the gospel comes to every man and woman of Adam born, within hearing of the ministers of God.

> "None are excluded thence, but those
> Who do themselves exclude;
> Welcome the learned and polite,
> The ignorant and rude."

No other king ever sent out an invitation so broad as this. But wisdom "crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man."

Is it not strange that when the householder made so great a supper, when he offered it without money and without price, that all his neighbours should with one consent begin to make excuse? He did not call them to prison or to misery; how then came they to be so unwilling to obey the summons? Whence this unanimity in the rejection? We find good men differing, how is it that evil men can hold together so well? What! not one who has respect enough to his generous

friend to sit at his table and receive his bounty? Not one. Truly, here, brethren, we have a picture of the universal depravity of man. All men are thus vile, and refuse the mercy of God. We never know how bad man is till the gospel is preached to him. The gospel acts as a white back-ground to set forth the blackness of man's heart. Here human nature reaches to the greatest height of sin's enormity. Spitting forth his venom against the Lord of infinite love, man proves himself truly to be of the serpent's brood. The gospel is preached to thousands, and do all make excuse? So the parable hath it, and truly so the fact proves it. What! is there not one whose free-will is inclined towards Christ? Is there not one of so good a natural disposition that he will come to Jesus? Nay, the text says, not one: "They *all* with one consent began to make excuse." How thoroughly hath father Adam ruined our understandings! What fools as well as rebels we are to refuse to partake of the banquet of love. We are altogether become unprofitable; there is not one who seeketh after God. You will, perhaps, remind me that there were other men besides those who made excuse. Most true; but these were in the highways and hedges, or in the streets and lanes of the city; and so those who do not hear the gospel, and therefore are not guilty of rejecting it, yet nevertheless are far off from God by wicked works, and strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. Thus, taking the two characters to represent all mankind, we find all to be enemies of God. Those in the highways need to be "compelled" to come in; they had a natural reluctance to feast at the good man's table; and so all sorts of men are averse to the gospel. They are perfectly willing to sin—content even to perish in sin, but to come to Christ, to accept the great atonement, to put their trust in Jesus, this is a thing they care not for, and with one consent, when they hear the gospel they begin to make excuse.

We fear that there are many in this meeting-house, this morning, who have been blessed with hearing the gospel for years, but hitherto, the only treatment they have given to the gracious message is to make excuses about it. I hope to deal with such very simply and very affectionately, earnestly desiring that they make their last excuse this morning, and that it may meet with its death-blow. O that they may come to the feast which they have long rejected, and rejoice in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

Why did they make an excuse? Let us, first, try to *account* for their conduct; secondly, *what excuses do they make?*—let us *recount* them; and thirdly, *how foolish thus to make excuses!*—here let us *encounter* them.

I. Let us try to ACCOUNT *for the fact, the sad fact, that men are so ready to make excuses rather than to receive the Word of God.*

We account for it in the first place by the fact that *they had no heart at all to accept the feast.* Had they spoken the truth plainly, they would have said, "We do not wish to come, nor do we intend to do so." If man's heart were not so deceitful, it would not make excuses, but it would say, outright, "'We will not have this man to reign over us:' we do not feel our sinfulness, we will not therefore accept pardon: we believe that we can work out our own salvation with our own doings; or, if not, we are content to take our chance. If it shall go ill with us,

it will go ill with a great many people. We will run all risks: we do not want salvation: we choose rather to have our full swing of carnal delights: your religion involves too much self-sacrifice; it is altogether contrary to the lustings of our minds, and therefore we decline it." This is at the bottom of it. Some of you, my hearers, have often been impressed, and partially convinced of sin, but you have put off Christ with excuses. Will you bear with me while I solemnly assure you, that at its core your heart is at enmity to God. Your excuse may look very pretty, but it is as flimsy as it is fair. If you were honest with your own soul, you would say at once, "I do not love Christ; I do not want his salvation." Your put-offs, your false promises, your excuses are worthless; any one with half an eye can see through them—they are so transparent. You are an enemy to God; you are unreconciled, and you are content to be so. This truth may be unpalatable, but it is nevertheless most certain. May God help you to feel this, and may it humble you before his presence.

Still, if they would not come to the good man's feast, why did not they say so? If the real secret of it was that they hated him and despised his provisions, is it not melancholy that *they were not honest enough to give him a "nay" at once?* Well, they certainly were not, and one reason might be because *they wished to be upon good terms with their conscience.* They felt they ought to go. He was one who had a claim upon their courtesy, if not their gratitude, and therefore feeling that they ought to go, and yet not intending to go, they sought to compromise by an excuse. Conscience is a very unamiable neighbour to men who live in sin. It is said of David, "David's heart smote him," and it is a very hard blow which the heart is able to give. In order to parry the blow, men hold up a shield of excuses. You cannot quite extinguish your conscience, which is the candle of the Lord, and therefore you put it under the bushel of an excuse. The thief fears the watch-dog, and therefore throws him a sop to keep him quiet—that sop is made of excuses. John Bunyan tells us that Mr. Recorder Conscience, when the town of Mansoul was in the keeping of Diabolus, used sometimes to cry out at such a rate that he made all the inhabitants afraid, and so they put him in a very dark place, and tried to put a gag into his mouth to keep him quiet, but for all that, sometimes when his fits came on, he made the town feel very uneasy. I know what conscience tells some of you: it says to you, "How is it you can forget divine things? How can you trifle with the world to come? How can you live as if you never meant to die? What will you do when you come to die, without an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ?" So, that conscience may be quiet awhile, you make an excuse, and persevere in refusing to come to the feast.

It may be that you make this excuse *to satisfy custom.* It is not the custom of this present age to fly immediately in the face of Christ. There are not many men of your acquaintance or mine, who ostensibly oppose religion. Your father fears God; your mother is a woman of great devotion; your friends go to the house of God and speak experimentally of divine things: you do not like therefore to say to them, "I will never be a Christian; I dislike the ways of God; I do not choose the plan of sovereign grace;" and therefore to spare their feelings you make

an excuse. You do not want to grieve dear friends, you are afraid if you spoke out honestly what your soul feels, that it might bring your mother with grey hairs to the grave, or make your father's heart to break, and so you make the excuse, that they may entertain a comfortable hope whereas, while you make excuses, there is no hope for you at all. For my part, I would rather you would speak outright and say what you mean I would that you would say, "I am an enemy of Christ; I do not believe his gospel; I will not serve him." This might sound very badly, but it would show, at least, that there was some sincerity in you, and we would hope that, ere long, you might be bowed to the will of Christ. Excuses are curses, and when you have no excuses left there will be hope for you.

It may be you make these excuses because *you have had convictions* which so haunt you at times that you dare not oppose Christ to his face. You have gone home from the services to weep. That little chamber of yours is a witness that you cannot live altogether without prayer. The other day when you went to a funeral, you came home with your mind very solemn, and you thought then that certainly you would yield to the commands of Jesus. When you were sick, and had that week or two upstairs alone, then you vowed and resolved; but your resolves melted into thin air. The tear starts to your eye, you are almost persuaded to be a Christian; you breathe a prayer, but ah! some ill companion tempts you the next morning, and according to the old proverb, "The dog hath returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Ah! how many times did I have convictions of sin, and terrible ones, too, and yet I said, like Felix to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" but I could not quench these convictions by downright opposition to Christ; I knew too much, and felt too much to do that, and so I tried to patch up a truce between my soul and my convictions.

Satan is always ready to help men with excuses. This is a trade of which there is no end. It certainly commenced very early, for after our first parents had sinned, one of the first occupations upon which they entered was to make themselves aprons of fig-leaves to hide their nakedness. Read the Scriptures through, and you will find that excuse-making has been a habit in all ages and among all classes of people; and till the last sinner shall be saved by sovereign grace, I suppose men will still be setting up their vain excuses in the temple of God. If you will fire the gun, Satan will always keep you supplied with ammunition. When he thinks that a truth is about to come home to you, if you cannot frame an excuse, he will do it for you; he will run between you and the cannon-shot of God's Word to prevent your being wounded by it. If the preacher's sword should be too sharp for you, and make your conscience bleed, the evil one has a Satanic plaister with which he very soon binds up the wound.

The natural self-righteousness of man prompts him to frame apologies. We are all the best men in the world according to our own gauge and measure. If we could sit as judges upon ourselves, the verdict would always be "Not guilty." Sin, which would be very shocking in another, is very venial in us; nay, what would be abominable in other men, becomes almost commendable in ourselves, so par-

tially do we judge our own case. Since the sinner cannot think it quite right for himself to be an unbeliever in Christ, since his enlightened conscience will not let him say that he is quite safe while he refuses to fly to the wounds of Jesus he runs to excuses in order that he may still say, "I am rich and increased in goods," and not be driven to the unhappy necessity of crying, "I am naked and poor and miserable." Sinful self is hard to conquer, but righteous self is the worst enemy of the two. When we can make men plead guilty, then God pronounces absolution upon them; but while men will interpose their extenuations, there is little or no hope for them. O great God, our Master, rend away the excuses from every sinner here, and make him stand guilty before thy bar in his own consciousness, that he may cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and find pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ. Take heed, O ye ungodly ones, lest ye go on excusing, and excusing, and excusing, until ye excuse yourselves down to the pit of hell; for this know, ye will never be able to excuse yourselves out again.

II. We come to RECOUNT *these excuses.*

Many will not come to the great supper—will not be Christians on the same ground as those in the parable—*they are too busy.* They have a large family, and it takes all their time to earn bread and cheese for those little mouths. They have a very large business—many servants in their employ, and from the first thing in the morning to the last thing at night, if they do not see after business, their affairs must go wrong. Or else, if they have no business, yet they have so many pleasures, and these require so much time—their butterfly visits during the morning take up so many hours—the dropping of their small pieces of pasteboard at other people's doors occupy all their leisure, and they really have no opportunity to think about matters so unpalatable as death and eternity. This excuse scarcely needs a word from me to answer it, because every man knows that it is grossly false. Nobody goes starving because he has not time to eat. Now, if God has given time for us to support our natural frame, much more has he given us time for the soul to feed. I do not find my friends in the street half dressed; but I find some of them spend many a half-hour over that other pin, and that other ribbon. Now, surely if they have time to dress the body, they must have had time given them in which to put on the robe of righteousness and array the soul. If you have not the time, God gave it to you, and you must have misspent it. God gives you time as a steward, and if you say to your Master, "I have it not," he will reply to you, "I entrusted it to you; you must have spent it on yourself; you have robbed God." A little earlier rising, a little less time at the table—either of these might give you time enough. You know you have the time, and when you say you have it not, the lie is too thin; you can see through it. O soul! O soul! when holy men can find hours for prayer; when such a man as Martin Luther, when he was very busy, used to say, "I must have three hours prayer to-day at least, or else I cannot get through my business," do not tell me that you have not time to seek the Lord. Besides, it is not an affair of time. Salvation may be wrought in an instant. There is life in a look at the crucified One; there is life at this moment for thee; and

between now and the time when this service shall have gone, there is time enough for thee to have laid hold upon eternal life, and to have received Christ Jesus to thy soul's salvation. That excuse will not do.

But then they fly to another. *They are too good.* When I have preached free grace and a full Christ, I have heard some say, "That is a good sermon for the crowd in a theatre, for ignorant, low-lived people; but we respectable people do not require such salvation. To offer a free salvation to men who are neither drunkards nor swearers, why the thing is ridiculous. The sermon was very good for Magdalens, for thieves, and such like, but not for us." No, you are *too good* to be saved. You need not a physician, because you are whole. Your own table has enough upon it, you do not need to come to this feast. But bethink you, I pray you, whether this be not all a mistake. In what are you better than other men, after all? What if you do not indulge in open sins, does not your heart often go a-lusting towards evil? Does your tongue always speak that which is right and true? If you cannot remember sins of commission, what about the sins of omission? Have you fed the hungry? Have you clothed the naked? Have you taught the ignorant? Have you loved God with all your heart, and soul, and strength? Have you given him all that he demands of you? Why you cannot say this. Now the perfection, the holiness, which God demands in order to salvation must be like a perfect alabaster vase: if there be a single crack or spot on it, all is spoiled. You may say, "Well, it is not much broken; we have not seriously damaged it;" nay, but God requires it to be perfect, and no matter how slight the damage it may have sustained, you cannot enter heaven upon the footing of your good works—you are cast out for ever. Hear these words, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," and "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." God save you from that false excuse.

Another class say, "*We are too bad to be saved.* The gospel cries, 'Believe in Jesus Christ and live,' but it cannot mean me; I have been too gross an offender. When I was but young I went into evil, and since then I have gone from bad to worse. O sir, I have cursed God to his face; I have sinned against light and knowledge, against a mother's prayers and tears. I have spoken evil of God's Word; I have laughed at the very name of his Son Jesus Christ. I am too evil to be saved." Here is another bad excuse. You *know*, sinner, if you have been a hearer of the gospel, that this is not true, for bad as you are, no man is excluded from Christ on account of his vileness. "All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." The invitations of the gospel do not stop at a certain point of sin, but on the contrary, they seem to select the worst sinners first. What did the Saviour say? "Begin at Jerusalem." But, Lord, the men live there who crucified thee. "Begin at Jerusalem." But, Lord, it was in Jerusalem that they shed thy blood, and thrust out the tongue and laughed at thee, and made a mockery of thy prayers. "Begin at Jerusalem"—the worst first. Just as the surgeon in a battle is wont to look to the worst cases first. Here is a man who has lost

his finger. Ah! well, let him bide awhile, we will see to that. But here is another who has lost a limb, and he is bleeding fast, and if the blood be not stopped, his life will ooze out. The surgeon gives him the first turn. O you great sinners, you who feel yourselves to have been notorious offenders, I pray you be not so guilty as to make this an excuse for not coming to Christ; on the contrary, use it as a reason why you should fly to him at once. The more filth, the more need of washing; the more sick, the more need of a physician; the more hungry, the more welcome to the table. Come to Jesus just as you are, with all your sins: "Though they be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." No form of sin, imaginable or unimaginable, can by any possibility, be a bar to any man's salvation, if he will but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then comes another excuse, "Sir, I would trust Christ with my soul this morning, but *I do not feel in a fit state to trust Christ.* I have not that sense of sin which I think to be a fit preparation for coming to Christ—

> "'If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
> To find I cannot feel.'"

Ah! my dear hearer, this is an excuse which looks like a very good one, but it has no truth in it. There is no fitness wanted before you may trust in Christ. Whatever may be your present condition, if you trust Jesus Christ with your soul, you are saved on the spot; your sins are forgiven you; you are made a child of God; you are accepted in the Beloved. Where do you read of fitness for Christ in the Scriptures? Were the dead whom Jesus restored, fit to be raised think you? Why, Martha said of her brother, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days;" was there any fitness in Lazarus for a resurrection? And yet Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" Does the gospel say, "He who is in a certain state, and then believeth, shall be saved;" no, but, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." How am I bidden to preach to you? Am I to say, "Whosoever feels this is to come?" no, but, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." Are you willing to have Christ? Then you may have him, for Christ is as free to every needy sinner as the drinking-fountain in the street is free to every thirsty passer-by. Trust Jesus, even if your heart be hard as granite—he can soften it. Trust him, though conscience be asleep; though all the mental faculties be perverted—trust him. It is his business to make you holy, not your business—trust him to do it all. He is called Jesus because he saves his people from their sins. Trust him to overcome your corruptions, to kill your evil temper, to subdue your will, to soften your heart, to enlighten your conscience, to inflame your love—trust him to do it all. O, be not so foolish as to say, "I am too ill to send for a doctor: when I get better, when I feel better, then I will send for him." Do not say, "I am so black; if I felt more clean, I would wash;" no, but wash *because* thou art black; wash *because* thou hast nothing but filth about thee; send for the great Physician *because* there is no health in thee. There is nothing in thee but wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores; therefore, let thy faith entrust thy healing entirely to him.

Here comes another, "O sir, I would trust Christ with my soul, but *it seems too good to be true*, that God should save me on the spot, this morning. You little know where I was last night, or what I did yester-

day; you cannot tell who I am, nor how bad I have been, and you tell me that if I trust Jesus Christ, I shall be saved. Sir, it is too good to be true, I cannot imagine it." My dear friend, dost thou measure God's corn with thy bushel? Because the thing seems an amazing thing to thee, should it therefore be amazing unto him? What if his thoughts should be as high above thy thoughts as the heavens are above the earth? Is not this just what he has said in Scripture? I know you find it hard to forgive your fellow-man, but my Father, my God, can readily forgive you.

> "Crimes of such horror to forgive,
> Such guilty daring worms to spare:
> This is thy grand prerogative,
> And none shall in the honour share."

He *creates* like a God; he does not make a few insects, or here and there a star, but this great world he fashioned, and he scattered the starry orbs about with both his hands. So when the Lord comes to pardon, he does not pardon some small offences and wink at trifles, but the whole mass of sin he cleanseth away in a moment, and all manner of sin and blasphemy, in an instant, he casteth behind his back. Do believe that God is God and not such a one as thou art; do think that he is capable of doing greater things than thou canst dream of. Trust him, trust him now, and however good the things are, thou shalt find them true; however great, they shall be thine.

I think I hear one say, "*It is too soon for me to come:* let me have a little look at the world first. I am scarce fifteen or sixteen. There is plenty of time for me." You have been to the graveyard. Are there not there the records of those who have found fifteen or sixteen none too soon, for lo, at that age, they were taken away to their last account. Too soon! Is it ever too soon to be happy? If religion made you miserable, I might advise you to put it off to the last, but inasmuch as to be in Christ is to be happy, you cannot be in him too soon. I have sat by many death-beds, and heard many regrets, but never did I hear a Christian regret that he was converted too soon. I have received many young converts into Church-fellowship, but I never heard any one of them say they were sorry to be called by grace so early. If I were condemned to die, and anyone should bring me a pardon, I should not think I received it too soon. The wrath of God abideth on you—can it be too soon to escape from it? You are the subject of daily temptations, and daily add to your sins—can it be too soon to have a new heart and a right spirit?

Others will row in the opposite direction, pleading, "*Alas! it is too late.*" The devil first puts the clock back and tells you it is too soon, and when this does not serve his turn, he puts it on and says, "The hour is passed, the day of grace is over; mercy's gate is bolted, you can never enter it." Let us answer this at once. It is never too late for a man to believe in Jesus while he is out of his grave. While the lamp of life continues to burn, the vilest sinner who returns shall find Christ ready to receive him. There have been men converted at a hundred years of age; we have instances on record of persons who have even passed the century and become children of Christ Jesus? How old are you? Are you in the sere and yellow leaf of eighty? Ah! thou hast many sins, but what a triumph of grace it will be when eighty

years of sin shall all be washed away in a moment! I tell you, that if you were as old as Methuselah, and in every year of that long life you had as many sins as you have already committed in the whole eighty years, yet the grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient to put all this away. Your sins may mount up like mountains, but the love of Christ, like Noah's flood, can go twenty cubits upwards, and the tops of the mountains shall be covered. It is not too soon; it is not too late; neither of these reasons are of any value though they delude many.

"Well," says another, "I would believe in Christ, but *I do not know whether I am one of God's elect or not.* Sir, that doctrine of election troubles me and staggers me. If I knew I was one of the elect, I would trust Christ." That is—if God will show you his secrets, then you will do God's will, and so the Almighty is to bend to your conditions, and then you will do as he bids you! You will come to feast at the man's table, if he will take you into his secret closet, and show you all his treasure! He will do nothing of the kind. How foolish this talk is about election! The doctrine of election is a great and precious truth, but it never can be a valid reason for a man's not believing in Christ. You are ill to-day, and the doctor comes, "There," says he, "there is the medicine, I will guarantee if you take it, it will heal you." You say, "Sir, I would take it at once, but I do not know whether I am predestinated to get over this fever. If I am predestinated to live, why then, sir, I will take the medicine, but I must know first." "Ah!" says the doctor, "I tell you what, if you do not take it, you are predestinated to die." And I will tell you this, if you will not believe in Jesus Christ, you will be damned, be you who you may, but you will not be able to lay it at predestination's door; it will lie at your own. A man has fallen overboard; a rope is thrown to him, but he says, "I should like to grasp that rope, only I do not know whether I am predestinated to be drowned." Fool! he will go down to the bottom with a lie in his mouth. We do not say, "I would sit down to dinner to-day, but I will not eat, because I do not know whether I am predestinated to have any dinner to-day." We do not talk so foolishly in common things, why then do we so in religion? When men are hard-up for an excuse, they are glad to run to the mysteries of God to use them as a veil to cover their faces. O my dear friends, you must know that though God has a chosen people, yet when he commands you to believe in Christ, his having a chosen people, or not having a chosen people cannot excuse you from obedience to the divine command: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." I could not attempt to go through all these excuses, and therefore after handling two more, I will have done.

"Well," says one, "if I were to believe in Christ *I should be as bad after a short time as I used to be.* I might be a little better for a time, but I should go back again; so it is of no use trusting Christ." That is to say, dear friend, *Jesus Christ* says if you trust him, he will save you: *you* say if you trust him, he will not save you. That is what it comes to. Jesus Christ promises that if you trust him, he will save you from your sins: you say, "No, I should go back to my sins and be as bad as before." Which am I to believe—your excuse, or his promise? Why, Christ's promise, surely! "But I tried once before," says one. Very likely *you* did, but *Christ* never tried, for if *he* had tried, *he* would have

succeeded. "Well, but, I did hold on a certain length of time." I dare say you did—*you* held on; but if Christ had hold of you, he would never have let you go. When *you* get hold of Christ you may soon drop him, but when Jesus gets hold of you, he says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." If you had greatly trusted Christ, he would not have suffered you to become what you used to be.

"Well," says one, "*I cannot trust Christ, I cannot believe him.*" You talk Latin, brother; you talk Latin. "No," you say, "I do not talk Latin." Yes, you do. I will translate that word into the English for you. It means, "*I will not.*" When you say, "I cannot," it means, "I will not;" and understand, whenever the minister says, "You cannot," he means, "you will not;" for he does not mean that you have any natural inability, but that you have a moral inability caused by your love of sin—a wilful inability. "I cannot," is the Latin, but "I will not," is the English of it. A man once sent his servant to a certain town to fetch some goods; and he came back without them. "Well, sir, why did you not go there?" "Well, when I got to a certain place, I came to a river, sir, a very deep river: I cannot swim, and I had no boat; so I could not get over." A good excuse, was it not? It looked so, but it happened to be a very bad one, for the master said, "Is there not a ferry there?" "Yes, sir." "Did you ask the man to take you over?" "No, sir." Surely the excuse was a mere fiction! So there are many things with regard to our salvation which we cannot do. Granted, but then there is a ferry there! There is the Holy Spirit who is able to do all things, and you remember the text, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" It is true you cannot make yourself a new heart, but did you ask for a new heart with sincerity and truth? Did you seek Christ? If you say, "Yes, I did sincerely seek Christ, and Christ would not save me," why then you are excused; but there never was a soul who could in truth say that. There never was a sinner yet who perished seeking Christ, and there never will be; and if thy heart's sincere desire is after the salvation which is treasured in Christ Jesus, then heaven and earth may pass away, but Christ will never cast you out while his own word stands, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "Still," you say, "I cannot trust Christ." Now, I am at issue with you here—I am at issue with every awakened sinner. I agree with you, if you will let me give my own translation of the word cannot—that you *will not*, but if it is to stand as the word is generally used, I am at issue with you. Suppose that you believe me to be an honest man, would it be fair after that, to say, "Sir, I cannot believe you?" Now, if you believe me to be a liar, I can very well understand that you cannot trust me; but if you take it for granted that I am incapable of telling a falsehood, and yet do not believe what I tell you, you are a liar. Now, you believe that Christ is incapable of falsehood; you are not like those who are ignorant of the character of Christ, and therefore you know him to be incapable of untruthfulness—and then you say you cannot believe him. Seeing that Jesus Christ cannot but speak truth, it cannot be a difficult thing for

any man to believe what he speaks. If you have sufficient light given you by the Holy Spirit, to know that Christ is the truth, I believe you have sufficient power from the same source to believe what Christ says. I trace this to God's gift, but I do pray you to exercise the power which you certainly have. Tell Christ you cannot believe him! Will you tell him that to his face, when he sits upon the judgment-seat at last? Will you dare to say this when his eyes of fire shall look you through and through? "Most holy Christ, I could not trust thee! Most truthful Saviour, I could not believe thee! I suspected thee, I doubted thee!" "Wherefore didst thou doubt me then? What cause had I ever given thee? Wherefore didst thou think me a liar? In what had I ever broken my promises, or when did I err from the truth?" "He that believeth not," says John, "hath made God a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." O, do think of this, and never make that excuse again. Instead of saying, "I cannot believe," say "I cannot make God a liar, I must therefore believe, for I know God is no liar—I must therefore trust his Son Jesus Christ.

I have recounted a few of these excuses; perhaps you will make another batch before the evening comes on—you who determine not to be saved. It is only the mighty Spirit of God who can sweetly constrain your will to yield to Christ, and so I close with these two or three words, upon the third point.

III. How foolish thus to make excuses. For first *remember with whom it is you are dealing.* You are not making excuses before a man who may be duped by them, but you make these excuses before the heart-searching God. My dear hearers, let me speak very solemnly, and push this point closely home. You know that God can see through all this—why then do you hang up such thin veils? Confess before him now your folly: "Lord, I have been an enemy to thee; Lord, I have been averse to thy Son Jesus Christ, and therefore have I patched up these excuses: forgive me; I see how foolish I have been; grant that I may do so no more."

Remember again, *what it is you are trifling with.* It is your own soul, the soul which can never die. You are trifling with a heaven which you will never see if you keep on with these excuses. You are trifling, sinner, with that hell which must be your never-ending portion if you continue as you are. Can you play with hell-fire? O, can you make sport of heaven? Can you laugh at the blood of Jesus? You are really doing so while you are thus halting between two opinions. Now if you must play the fool, find something cheaper to play with than this. O sirs, if you must have mirth, I pray you have it out of something else than this. To be saved! hark to heaven's music! To be lost! listen to heli's groans! Neither of these things are matters for you to play with. Say, as now you are sitting here—I pray God help you to say it before you leave this house—"Lord, I have been trifling with eternity; I have been making frivolous excuses rather than I would accept thy love in Christ; I have trifled with heaven and hell: grant, Lord, that this may be brought to an end, that I may love and trust thee this day."

Remember, again, that these excuses will look very different soon.

How will you make excuses when you come to die, as die you must? When death gets the grip of you, and the strong man faileth, and they wipe the death-sweat from your fevered brow, when the glaze of death's night is coming over your eyeballs, what will you think of these excuses then? It may be, you will rave with very fury at yourselves, that you could have played with your souls to such an extent. What will you do with your excuses when you stand at the bar of judgment? The trumpet rings, you have awakened from your grave, you stand amidst the myriads to be judged. The books are opened, and Christ proclaims your doom—"Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Will excuses comfort you then? Will you be able to say then, "Lord, it was too soon; Lord, it was too late; Lord, I was too great a sinner to believe in Jesus, or I did not need a Saviour?" Nay, when the trumpet peals, and the heavens are in a blaze; when the sun is turned into sackcloth, and the moon into blood, and the stars fall like fig-leaves from the tree, you will find other work to do than excuse-making; you will weep and wail because of sin, and when you are cast into hell, what will you make then of your excuses? Written in letters of fire, you shall see in one tremendous arch above your heads, "Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not; you heard the gospel, but you made excuses." Thundering more tremendous than the trump of resurrection, shall come these words to you, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. . . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." O, the Lord have mercy upon you, excuse makers, and bring you to look to Jesus now. *Now*, I say, for the Scripture saith, "*To-day* is the accepted time, *to-day* is the day of salvation." The only way to end your excuses is not by praying nor resolving, but by looking to Christ. There hangs the bleeding Saviour on the cross, he dies the just for the unjust to bring us to God; he suffers there that sin may be forgiven. Look thou to him, trust thou to him, and thou shalt be saved. My hearer, I give thee now in God's name this invitation, this command, trust thy soul to Jesus, the Son of God, who suffered for sin, and thou shalt be saved. But mind you this. I may never meet you all this side the grave, but I will meet you all at God's great day, and if you receive not Christ and trust in him, I am clear of your blood. Upon my skirts your doom cannot fall. Ye have heard the gospel, ye have been told to trust Jesus as you are, you have been assured that he is able to save to the uttermost them that come to him. You have been bidden to come, and now on your own heads be your soul's ruin if ye come not. But may the Spirit of God take these things and apply them to your souls. May he be as a fire and as a hammer in your souls: as a fire to melt, or as a hammer to break; and may you to-day with brokenness of heart take Christ to be your Saviour, both now and for ever. Amen.

A Straight Talk

"I cannot come"—Luke xiv. 20.

THERE are different ways of replying to the invitation of the gospel when you mean to refuse it. They are all, at bottom, bad, and they may all be classed under one head; for "they all with one consent began to make excuse"; but yet some are more decently worded than others, and have a greater show of reason about them. The first two sets of people, who were invited to the supper, said to the servant, apologetically, with some appearance of courtesy, "I pray thee have me excused." But the third man did not beat about the bush at all, or pray to be excused; but he said tersely, bluntly, sharply, "*I cannot come.*" This was a final reply; he did not intend, nor wish, to come to the supper. "*I cannot come,*" was a snappish word; but as he had married a wife, he thought the idea of his coming was utterly unreasonable, and he needed no sort of excuse.

Now, what did that mean? Well, it meant that he thought very lightly of the giver of the feast. He had no respect for this "certain man," who had made a great supper. He had an opportunity of slighting him by refusing his invitation, and he did so outspokenly, saying, "*I cannot come.*"

It also showed that he had a very low opinion of the supper itself. It might be a respectable meal, but he did not want it: he could have quite as good a supper at home. He was better off than those people in the streets. Those hedge-birds might be glad enough of a supper for nothing; but he was not dependent upon anybody, and he could do very well for himself. Do you not know many in this world who have no opinion of Christ, no love to God? Religion is to them mere nonsense—an unpractical, dreamy matter, about which they have no time to concern themselves. It is a pitiful thing that the God, whom angels worship, they will not even think of; and the Christ who is the loveliest of the lovely—in him they see no beauty; and the priceless provisions of mercy, the pardon of sin, the salvation of the soul, the

heaven of God—they neglect these things, as if they did not need them, or could get them whenever they please. Thousands are proudly independent of the free grace of God; they are good enough, and virtuous enough; and need not cry for mercy, like the wicked and profane. In their own judgment, they are quite able to fight their own way to heaven. They want not the charities of the gospel. Contempt of the great Feast-maker, and contempt of the feast itself—these two pieces of proud disdain induce a man to say, "*I cannot come.*"

But there was more than common pride in this brief, brusque speech, for this man had, at the first, made a promise to come. He had been bidden, and it is implied in the parable that he had at that time accepted the invitation. He had accepted the cards of invitation to the supper; and, though he had done so, he now flies in the face of his own self, and says, "I cannot come." I think that I am addressing some here who have pledged themselves many a time to come to Christ. If I remember rightly, you asked the prayers of friends, and promised that you would be in real earnest. You looked your wife in the face, and said, "I hope that it will not be long before I am with you in the church of God, and shall no longer have to go away and leave you alone at the Lord's table." You asked some of your Christian friends to make a point of praying for you; but you have never carried out your intention of becoming a true Christian. Your resolutions may be still read in God's eternal book of record; but they are there as witnesses to your falseness and changeableness. The counterfoils are there; but there is no fulfilment of any of the resolutions. God remembers them, although you have forgotten to carry them out. You accepted the invitation on the spur of the moment; but when worldliness had got the upper hand with you, you went back to your own obstinacy, and said, "I cannot come." Perhaps you have not said it in quite as sharp a tone as I used just now; but it has come to the same thing, for you have not come to the Gospel Supper. It matters little whether you say it angrily or quietly; for if you do not come, the practical result is the same. I think I hear some of you, even now, say, "Do not ask me so often. I cannot come. It is of no use to worry me about it. I do not wish to be uncivil or unkind. Though I said I would come, I retract my words: I cannot come."

In saying, "I cannot come," the man intended, as it were, to dismiss the matter. He wished to be understood as having made up his mind, and he was no longer open to argument. He did not parley; he did not talk; but he just said, off-hand, "I want no more persuading; I cannot come, and that settles it." Certain of our hearers have come to such a condition of heart that they would gladly silence our gospel expostulations: with a kindly but determined tone they would say, "*I cannot come.* Do not trouble me any more."

I suppose that this man, after he had made that positive declaration, felt that there was truth in what he had stated. He said, "*Therefore* I cannot come." He had reason to support him in what he said, and he went home, sat down, and enjoyed himself, and felt that he was a righteous man, quite as good as those who had gone to the supper, and perhaps rather better. He could not blame himself,

for when a man cannot do it, why, of course, he cannot do it; and why should he be censured for an impossibility? "I cannot come": how can I help that? So he sat down with a cool indifference to eat his own supper. It was nothing to him whether the great giver of the feast was grieved or not; whether his oxen and fatlings were wasted or not. He had said it to his conscience very often, till he half believed it—"I cannot come, and there is no disputing it." I have no doubt that many, who have never come to Christ, have made themselves content to be without him by the belief that they cannot come. Although the impossibility, if it did exist, would involve the greatest of all calamities, yet they speak of it with very little concern. Practically, they say, "I cannot be saved. I must remain an unbeliever." What an awful thing for any mortal to say! Yet you have said it till you almost believe it; and you wish us now to leave you quite alone for this dreadful reason. You do not want to be troubled to-night. The text already begins to startle you a little, and you do not like it. You are almost sorry that you are here. If the Lord helps me, I will trouble you far more before you get out of this place: I have heavy tidings from the Lord for you. I shall endeavour, if I can, to pull away those downy pillows from your sleepy head, and wake you up to immediate anxiety, lest you perish in your sins. With kindly importunity I would plead with you and try to show you that this little speech of yours, "*I cannot come*," is a wretched speech. You must throw it to the winds, and prove that you can come by coming at once, and receiving of the great feast of love, and honouring him that spreads it for hungry souls.

Two or three things I would like to say about this case, for *it is very serious*. It was bad enough for this man to say, "I cannot come," but it is far worse for you to say, "I cannot come to Christ." Remember, if the invited guests did not come, and come at once, they could never come, for there was only that one supper, and not a series of banquets. The great man who made the feast did not intend to prepare another. A very grave offence would be committed by their not coming to the one supper. My dear hearers, there is only one time of grace for you, and if that be ended, you will not have a second opportunity. There is only one Christ Jesus; there is no more sacrifice for sin. There is only one way of eternal love and mercy; do not forsake it. I pray you, do not turn away from the one door of life, the one way of salvation. If it is slighted now, and the feast is over, as it will be when you die, then you have lost the great privilege, and you have been guilty of a gross neglect, from the consequences of which you never will be able to escape. Note this, and beware.

Besides, it is not merely a supper that you will lose when you say, "I cannot come." To lose a supper would be little, and might soon be set right when breakfast-time came round. But you lose eternal life, and that lost in time can never be found in eternity. You lose the pardon of sin, reconciliation to God, adoption into the family of love—these are heavy losses. You lose the joy of faith for life, and you lose comfort in death—who can estimate this damage? Lose not your immortal soul! Oh, lose not *that!* For if you gain

the whole world, it will not recompense you for such a loss. Lose what you will, but lose not your soul, I pray you! Seek that salvation without which it had been better for you that you had never been born.

Besides, once more, if you do not come to Christ, it will imply the greatest insult that you can put upon your Maker. You have already grieved him by breaking his laws; but what will be his indignation when you refuse his mercy? when you turn your back on his Son? when you refuse not only your God, but your crucified Saviour, hanging there with outstretched arms, bleeding his life away, that he may save you? Do not turn your back on your own redemption. No blood was ever sprinkled on the threshold of an Israelite's house; for he must not trample on it: that would be ruinous indeed. The blood was on the lintel and on the two side-posts, but never under foot. Trample not upon the blood of Christ; but you will do so if you refuse his great salvation. If you will not come to him to be saved, you have as good as said that you will be damned rather than be loved by God—that you will be damned rather than be saved through Jesus Christ his Son. It will prove a costly insult to you, as well as a grievous affront to your Lord.

Having said so much by way of preface, I am now going to take these words, "*I cannot come*," and handle them a little with the hope that you may grow ashamed of them.

I. First, this man declared, "I cannot come," because he said, "I HAVE MARRIED A WIFE." He had promised to come to the supper, and he was bound to fulfil his promise. Why did he want to get married just then? Surely, he had not been compelled to marry all in a hurry, so that he could not keep engagements already made. He was bound to keep his promise to the maker of the feast; and that promise was claimed of him by the messenger. He could not say that his wife would not let him come. Such a declaration might be true in England; but in the East the men are always masters of the situation, and women seldom bear rule in the family. No Oriental would say that his wife would not let him come. Nor in these Western regions, where the woman more nearly gains her rights, can any man truthfully say that his wife will not allow him to be a Christian. I do not believe that any of you will be able to say, when you come to die, that your wife was responsible for your not being a Christian. Most men would be angry if we told them that they were hen-pecked, and could not call their souls their own. He must be a fool, indeed, who would let a woman lead him down to hell against his will. The fact is, a man is a mean creature when he tries to throw the blame of his sin upon his wife. I know that Father Adam set us a bad example in that respect; but the fact that this was a part of the sin which caused the ruin of our race should act as a beacon to us. You certainly, as a man, ought not to demean yourself so much as to say, "I cannot come, for my wife will not let me." If one of you, however, continues to whine "My wife is my ruin. I am unable to be a Christian because of my wife," I must ask you a question or two before I believe your pitiable story. Do you let her rule you in everything else? Does she keep you at home of an evening? Does she pick all your companions for you?

Why, my dear man, if I am not much mistaken, you are a self-willed, cross-grained, pig-headed animal about everything else; and then, when it comes to the matter of religion, you turn round, and whine about being governed by your wife! I have no patience with you. It is more than probable that the very best thing that could happen to you would be to have your wife on the throne for the next few years. Upon such a solemn matter as this do not talk nonsense. You know that the blame lies with yourself alone: if you wished to seek the best things, the little woman at home would be no hindrance to you.

This man said, "*I cannot come.*" Why? Because he had a wife! Strange plea! for surely that was a reason why he should come, and bring her with him. If any man, unhappily, has a wife opposed to the things of God, instead of saying, "I cannot be a Christian, for I have an unconverted wife," he should seek for double grace that he may win his wife to Christ. If a woman laments that she has an unconverted husband, let her live the nearer to God that she may save her husband. If a servant has an unconverted master, let him labour with double diligence to glorify God, that he may win his master. Thus you see there are two reasons why you should come to the gospel banquet; not only for your own sake, but for the sake of your unconverted relatives. My neighbour's candle is blown out; and is that a reason why I must not light mine? No, but that is a reason why I should be all the more careful to keep mine burning, that I may light my neighbour's candle too. It is a pity that my wife should be lost, but I cannot help her by being lost myself. Nay; but I may help her if I take my stand, and follow Christ the more resolutely because my wife opposes me. Good man, do not allow your wife to draw you aside! Good woman, do not let your husband hinder you! Do not say, "I cannot attend the house of God, nor be a Christian while I have such a husband as I have." Nay, that is the reason why you should take your stand the more bravely in the name of God that, by your example, those whom you love may be rescued from destruction. How knowest thou, O wife, but that thou mayest save thy unbelieving husband? How knowest, thou, O servant, but that thou mayest save thy unbelieving master? I remember hearing Mr. Jay tell a story about a Nonconformist servant-girl, who went to live in a family of worldly people who attended the Church of England, although they were not real believers. They were outside buttresses of the church, and they had very little to do with the inside of it; and outsiders are generally the most bigoted. They were very angry with their servant for going to the little meeting-house, and threatened to discharge her if she went again. But she went all the same, and very kindly but firmly assured them that she must continue to do so. At last she received notice to go: they could not, as good Church-people, have a Dissenter living with them. She took their rough dismission very patiently; and it came to pass that, the day before she was to leave her situation, a conversation took place somewhat of this sort. The master said, "It is a pity, after all, that Jane should go. We never had such a good girl. She is very industrious, truthful, and attentive." The wife said, "Well, I have thought that it is hardly the thing to send her away for going to her chapel. You always speak

up for religious liberty, and it does not look quite like religious liberty to turn our girl away for worshipping God according to her conscience. I am sure she is a deal more careful about her religion than we are about ours." So they talked it over, and they said, "She has never answered us pertly, nor found fault with us about our going to church. Her religion is a greater comfort to her than ours is to us. We had better let her stay with us, and go where she likes." "Yes," said the husband, "and I think we had better go and hear the minister that she goes to hear. Evidently she has got something that we have not got. Instead of sending her away for going to chapel, we will go with her next Sunday, and judge the matter for ourselves." And they did, and the master and mistress were not long before they were members of that same church. Do not say, therefore, "I cannot come, because my master and mistress object to it." Do not make idle excuses out of painful facts which are reasons why you should be more determined than ever, even if you have to go to heaven alone, that you will be a follower of Christ. Keep to your resolve, and you may entertain the hope and belief that you will lead others to the Saviour's feet.

II. A second reason is even more common. It is not everybody who can say, "I have married a wife"; but everywhere you can meet with a person who pleads, "I HAVE NO TIME." You say, "Sir, I cannot attend to religion, for I have no time." I remember hearing an old lady say to a man who said that he had no time, "Well, you have got all the time there is." I thought that it was a very conclusive answer. You have had the time, and you still have all the time there is—why do you not use it? Nobody has more than twenty-four hours in a day, and you have no less. You have no time? That is very singular! What have you done with it; you certainly have had it? Time flies with you, I know, but so it does with me, and with everybody. What do you do with it? "Oh, I have no time," says one. I say again, you have had the time, and that time was due, in part, to a solemn consideration of the things of God. You have robbed God of that part of time which was due to him, and you have given up to some inferior thing what your great Lord and Master could rightly claim for the highest purposes.

You have time enough for common things. See here, I never meet any of you, in the middle of the day, in the street in your shirt-sleeves. I do not find you going up and down Cheapside half-dressed. "Oh, no, of course, we have time to put on our clothes." You have time to dress your bodies, and no time to dress your souls with the robe of Christ's righteousness? Do not tell me that! I do not meet any one of our friends saying, towards evening, "I am ready to faint, for I have had nothing to eat since I got up. I have had no time to get a morsel of meat." No, no, they have had their breakfast, and they have had their dinner, and so on. "Oh, yes, we have time to eat," says one. Do you tell me that you have time to feed your bodies, and that God has not given you time in which to feed your souls. Why, it is not common-sense! Such statements will not hold water for a moment. You must have time to feed your souls in, if you have time to feed your bodies in. People find time to look in the glass, and wash their faces, and brush their hair. Have you no time whatever to look at

yourself, to see your spiritual spots, and to wash in the fountain that is open for sin and for uncleanness? O dear sirs, you have time for common things, and you must certainly have time for those much more serious and important matters which concern your souls and immortality!

You have no time? How is this, when you waste a good deal? How much do many of us spend in silly talk? How much time do certain persons spend in frivolous amusements? I have heard people say that they have no time, when I am sure I do not know what they can have to occupy them. Are there not many people about who, if they were tied in a knot, and thrown into the Bay of Biscay, would be missed by nobody; for they do no good to any mortal being? They are living without an object—purposeless, aimless lives; and yet they talk about not having time! Such pretences will not do. When you plead with God, say something that looks like common-sense.

You have no time, and yet you undertake more secular work. You keep a shop, do you not? "Yes, I have a large shop." You are going to enlarge it, are you not? Will you have time, do you think, to attend to it when the business grows? "Oh, yes, I dare say that I shall find time: at any rate, I must make time, somehow or other." You are going to take a second shop, are you not? How will you manage it? "Oh, I shall find time." Yes, my dear sirs, you can find time for all those enlargements, and speculations, and engagements; let me be plain with you, and say that you could find time for thought about your soul if you had a mind to do so. To plead that you have no time for religion is a fraud. It will not do! It is lying unto God to say that you have no time. When a man wants to do a thing, if he has no time, he makes time. I beg the idle man not to go on to deceive himself with the notion that he has no time. "Where there's a will there's a way." Where there is a heart to religion there is plenty of time for it. Blame your unwilling minds, and not your scanty hours. You will have time enough when your hearts are once turned in the right direction.

Besides, time is not the great matter. Did the Lord demand of you a month's retirement from business? Did we command you to spend two days in a week in prayer? Did we tell you that you could not be saved unless you shut yourself up an hour every morning for meditation? I would to God you could have an hour for meditation! but, if you cannot, who has demanded it of you? The command is that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and forsake your sin; and this is a matter which will not interfere with your daily work. A man can turn the potter's wheel, and pray. A man can lay bricks, and pray. A man can drive the plane, and pray. A man can walk behind a plough, and yet he can be walking with God. A woman can scrub a floor, and commune with God. A man can be riding on horseback, and yet he can still be in communion with the Most High. A woman can be making the beds, and growing in grace. It is not a matter in which time comes in so much as to interfere with any of the ordinary duties of life. Therefore throw away that excuse, and do not say any longer, "I cannot come because I have no time." At once repent of sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus; and then all

your time will be free for the service of the Lord, and yet you will have not a moment the less for the needful duties of your calling.

III. There is a third form of this excuse, and a very common one: "I HAVE MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO." Now, come! I will have you by the throat over that. I shall contradict you flatly. *You have nothing more important to do.* That would be utterly impossible. Nothing under heaven can be of one-hundredth part of the importance of your being reconciled to God, and saved through Jesus Christ. What is that more important business? To make money? Where is the importance of that? You may get a pile of it, and the net result will be greater care, and the more to leave when you die. But you tell me you must have an opportunity for study. Well, that is better; but what are you going to study? Science? Art? Politics? Are these important as compared with the saving of your soul? Why, if you have an educated mind, and it is lost, it will be as bad to lose it in culture and learning as to lose it in ignorance. Your first duty is to be right with your God, who made you. Put nothing before your God. Has Christ redeemed you? Rest not till you know the truth of that redemption by being reconciled to God through the death of his Son. Nothing can be so important to a man as to be obedient to his Maker, and enjoy his Maker's love. Nothing, therefore, can be so important to a man as to be pardoned through the Saviour, and changed by the power of the Holy Spirit from an enemy of God into a friend of God.

"Oh!" say you, "but my business occupies so much of my time." Yes; but do you not know that very likely your business would go on better if you were right with God? Many a time a business goes wrong because the man is wrong; and sometimes it is even incumbent upon God to be at cross-purposes with a man because a man is at cross-purposes with him. If you walk frowardly towards him, he will walk frowardly towards you; but when you are obedient to him, he can make other things subservient to you. In a little church on the Italian mountains I saw, amongst many absurd daubings, one picture which struck me. There was a ploughman who had turned aside at a certain hour to pray. The rustic artist drew him upon his knees before the opened heavens; and, lest there should be any waste of time occasioned by his devotion, an angel was going on with the ploughing for him. I like the idea. I do not think an angel ever did go on with a man's ploughing while he was praying, but I think that the same result often comes to pass, and that when we give our hearts to God, and seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things are added unto us. If religion does not make you richer, which it may not do, it will make you more contented with what you have. The blessing of God, with a dinner of herbs, will make it better than a stalled ox without that benediction. He that would make the best of this world, and have the greatest enjoyment here of the truest and best kind, will do well to give his first attention to his Saviour, and his whole heart to faith in him, and diligence in his service. You have no more important business, I am quite sure, than the business which concerns God and eternity.

IV. I have heard some use the excuse "I CANNOT AFFORD TO BE A CHRISTIAN." Well, my friend, let us have a talk about *that*. Cost you more than you can afford? What do you mean? What cost? Cost you money? It need not. It will cost you no more than you like to spend upon it with a glad heart. God will give you a generous spirit, which will make you love to support his cause, and to help the poor, and contribute your share to all Christian mission work. But in the kingdom of Christ there is no taxation. Giving becomes a gratification, liberality a luxury. Nothing will be dragged from you by force. Surely, our God abhors money that comes into his exchequer by anything but the freewill offerings of loving hearts. It will not cost you much in that way, I am sure, for you are only to give as God has prospered you.

Suppose man should say, "Well, I must take a seat in the chapel if I would comfortably hear the gospel." Very well. Will it be unjust that you bear your proportion of necessary expenses in supporting the man who gives all his time, thought, and ability to you? Will you pay as much in a year to hear the gospel as many pay for one night at the play? Ay, and do not many at a horse-race spend a hundred times more than they ever gave throughout their whole existence either to the poor or to the church of God? What you will save by holy, gracious, thrifty habits, will render this no loss to you, but a gain.

"Oh, but I meant that I could not afford it, for I should have to lose several friends." Is that friend worth keeping who is an enemy to God? The woman who would lead you away from God, or the man who would keep you out of heaven—are friends of that sort worth having? Be brave, and end a connection which will otherwise endlessly connect you with the bottomless pit.

"Oh," says one, "but I mean that I should lose so much in trade." Ah, well! I will not ask you to explain what you mean by that; for there is an ugly look about that statement. You know more about your trade than I do. No doubt there are trades which pander to the vices of men, and become all the more profitable in proportion to the growth of drunkenness and impurity. These must be given up. Moreover, there are traders who live by puffery, and lying, and cheating; and I do not recommend you to profess to be a Christian if that is your line of things. It is better to give up all profession of religion when you go in for unrighteous gain. What? Did I hear a hint about adulteration? Did I also hear that you do not give full weight and true measure? Ah, my dear fellow! give up that game at once, whether you become a Christian or not; but certainly, if that is what you mean, the loss of dishonest profits will be a great gain to you, both for this life and the next.

"Well," says one, "I should have to give up a good many pleasures." Pleasures which block the road to heaven ought to be given up at once. You may think me a very melancholy sort of person; but I fancy that I am about as happy as any man in England. I appreciate a merry thought and a cheerful speech as much as anybody. I can laugh, and I can enjoy good, clean, humorous remarks as well as most people; and, having now served the Lord for nearly forty

years, I bear my witness that I have never had to relinquish a single pleasure for which I have felt a deliberate desire. As soon as you are renewed in heart, you are changed in your pleasures; and that which might have been a pleasure once to you would then be a misery. If I had to sit in some people's company, and hear what some people talk about, it would be hell to me. One night, having to preach up in the North of England, this unfortunate circumstance occurred to me. When I got down to the railway, I was put into a first-class carriage with five racing gentlemen, who were going to Doncaster races. Happily they did not know me, but from the beginning to the end the conversation of these gentlemen was garnished with expressions which tortured me, and at last they fell upon a subject which was unutterably loathsome. I pray God that I may not be condemned to dwell with such people for ever, for it would be hell to me. Ladies and gentlemen, you need not think that I rob myself of any pleasure when I do not go to race-courses, or associate with the licentious. It is my pleasure to keep far off from the pleasures of those men of pleasure, in whose company I was forced to spend that evening. The pleasures of this world are so full of dust, dirt, and grit, that he who has once washed his mouth clean of them, declines another meal of such draff. You will lose no pleasure if you come to Christ.

V. I hear one other person say, "I cannot come." Why not? "Well, sir, I do not mean that I shall not come one of these days; but IT WOULD NOT BE CONVENIENT JUST NOW. I could not yield my heart to the Lord to-night." No. I know. You have an engagement to-morrow which must be attended to, but it would not be quite the thing for a Christian. Just so. It would not be convenient to-night, nor on Monday, nor will it be on Tuesday, depend upon it. Your anxious thoughts will have gone by then. It will not be convenient to be saved! You want to see a little "life," do you not? "Life" in London means death. "Oh, but just now I am only an apprentice!" Then at once be bound apprentice to Christ. "But I am a journeyman. When I get a little business of my own, then will be the time." Will it? Oh, that you would become a journeyman to Christ! "But I have associations just now that render it difficult." That is to say, God must wait your convenience. Is that the way the poor treat the doctors who receive patients gratis? Do they say, "Doctor, it is not convenient for me to call upon you before ten or eleven o'clock in the morning. It is not convenient for me to come to your house. I shall be glad to see you if you come to my house about half-past eleven in the evening." Would you send a message to a physician in the West End, that you will be pleased for him to attend to you for nothing if he will come at your time? "Oh," say you, "I should not think of insulting a doctor like that, if he is kind enough to attend to me for nothing." And yet you will insult your God! You mean that God is not worthy of your strength and health; but when you are old, and worn out, then you mean to sneak into heaven, and cheat the devil. It is dirt mean of you! I can say no better. Though the Lord is exceedingly gracious and merciful, yet, when men make up their minds to it that they will only give him

the fag-end of life, it is small wonder that they die in their sins. What must God think of such treatment? Do not say, "I cannot come." Come at once. The Lord help you to come!

VI. I have heard people say, "I cannot come, sir, for I CANNOT UNDERSTAND IT. I am a poor man, I never had any education." What is it that you cannot understand? Can you not understand that you have broken God's law, and that the just God must punish you for it? You can understand that. Can you not understand that, if you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is certain that he took your sin, and bore it in his own body on the tree, and put your sin away, for his name is the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"? Can you not understand that, if you trust in him, you have him to stand in your room, and place, and stead; for the Scripture says, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." You *can* understand it, if you wish to do so. There is nothing in the gospel which the poorest and the least educated cannot understand if their minds be made willing to know and receive the truth. If the Spirit of God will come upon them, they can not only understand the gospel, but grasp it, and enjoy it, and begin to teach it to others, too; for the Lord makes the babes to have knowledge and discretion in his ways, while the wise and learned in scientific matters often miss the way to the eternal kingdom.

I have done. The sound of the bell tells me that my time has fled. Another bell will one day warn *you* that you have done, and that your life is over, even as my sermon is over. But I wanted just to say this. If there is any man here who says, "I cannot come," I beg him to express himself properly, and speak out the sad fact as it ought to be spoken. Here is the style: "Unhappy wretch, I cannot come to Christ! Millions in heaven have come, but I cannot come. My mother died in a good hope; but, 'Mother, I cannot come.' My father has gone home to be with Jesus; but I cannot come." I thank God that this statement is not true; but if you say it, and believe it, you ought never to rest any more; for if you cannot come to Christ, you are the unhappiest person in the world. Is there any woman that cries, "I cannot come," or any man that pleads, "I cannot come"? Wherever you are sitting or standing, let the bell that told out the death of the last hour, warn you of your spiritual death; for if you cannot come to Christ, and eat of his supper, you cannot be saved. You cannot escape from the wrath to come: you are doomed for ever.

May I ask you to do another thing? If you still intend to say, "I cannot come," will you speak the truth now? Will you alter a word, and get nearer the truth? Say, "I will not come." "I cannot come," is Greek, or double Dutch; but the plain English is, "I WILL NOT COME." I wish you would say *that* rather than the other, because the recoil of saying, "I will not come: I will not believe in Jesus: I will not repent of sin: I will not turn from my wicked ways"—the recoil, I say, from that might be blessed by God to you to make you see your desperate state. I wish you would then cry, "I cannot sit down, and make my own damnation sure by saying that I will not come to Christ."

Will you now, instead of refusing to come, resolve to come at once? Say, "I will come to Jesus. Tell me how." You can only come to Christ by trusting him. Trust yourself with him, and he will save you. Never did anyone trust Jesus in vain. Trust has a powerful influence over the Lord Jesus. He comes to the rescue of a soul that leans wholly upon him. He will do all things for you: he will change your nature as well as forgive your sin; and your nature being changed, you shall lead a new life from this time forth, and grow in grace until you become like him in whom you trust; and then he will take you to be for ever with him. Washed in the blood of the Lamb, you shall walk with him in white amidst the glorified.

Thus I have talked to-night in a very homely way. I pray the Lord to bless words which are intended to be faithful, plain, and impressive. May we meet in heaven! There are very many strangers here to-night; may you not be strangers to the Lord Jesus! Many of our friends are away, and some of you have come out although it is a nasty wet evening: I take this as a token for good. God bless you! I pray that you may get the double blessing, and may remember this gloomy, dark, Decembery evening in May by the blessing that God shall put upon you through Jesus Christ his Son. Amen.

"Compel Them to Come In"

"Compel them to come in."—Luke xiv. 23.

I FEEL in such a haste to go out and obey this commandment this morning, by compelling those to come in who are now tarrying in the highways and hedges, that I cannot wait for an introduction, but must at once set about my business.

Hear then, O ye that are strangers to the truth as it is in Jesus—hear then the message that I have to bring you. Ye have fallen, fallen in your father Adam; ye have fallen also in yourselves, by your daily sin and your constant iniquity; you have provoked the anger of the Most High; and as assuredly as you have sinned, so certainly must God punish you if you persevere in your iniquity, for the Lord is a God of justice, and will by no means spare the guilty. But have you not heard, hath it not long been spoken in your ears, that God, in his infinite mercy, has devised a way whereby, without any infringement upon his honour, he can have mercy upon you, the guilty and the undeserving? To you I speak; and my voice is unto you, O sons of men; Jesus Christ, very God of very God, hath descended from heaven, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. Begotten of the Holy Ghost, he was born of the Virgin Mary; he lived in this world a life of exemplary holiness, and of the deepest suffering, till at last he gave himself up to die for our sins, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." And now the plan of salvation is simply declared unto you—"Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved." For you who have violated all the precepts of God, and have disdained his mercy and dared his vengeance, there is yet mercy proclaimed, for "whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." "For this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief;" "whosoever cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out, for he is able also to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." Now all that God asks of you—and this he gives you—is that you will simply look at his bleeding dying son, and trust your souls in the hands of him whose name alone can save from death and hell. Is it not a marvellous thing, that the proclamation of this gospel does not receive the unanimous consent of men? One would think that as soon as ever this was preached, "That whosoever believeth shall have eternal life," every one of you, "casting away every man his sins and his iniquities," would lay hold on Jesus Christ, and look alone to his cross. But alas! such is the desperate evil of our nature, such the pernicious depravity of our character, that this message is despised, the invitation to the gospel feast is rejected, and there are many of you who are this day enemies of God by wicked works, enemies to the God who preaches Christ to you to-day, enemies to him who sent his Son to give his life a ransom for many. Strange I say it is that it should be so, yet nevertheless it is the fact, and hence the necessity for the command of the text,—"Compel them to come in."

Children of God, ye who have believed, I shall have little or nothing to say to

you this morning; I am going straight to my business—I am going after those that will not come—those that are in the byeways and hedges, and God going with me, it is my duty now to fulfil this command, "Compel them to come in."

First. I must *find you out*; secondly, I will go to work to *compel you to come in.*

I. First, I must FIND YOU OUT. If you read the verses that precede the text, you will find an amplification of this command: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind;" and then, afterwards, "Go out into the highways," bring in the vagrants, the highwaymen, "and into the hedges," bring in those that have no resting-place for their heads, and are lying under the hedges to rest, bring them in also, and "compel them to come in." Yes, I see you this morning, you that are *poor.* I am to compel *you* to come in. You are poor in circumstances, but this is no barrier to the kingdom of heaven, for God hath not exempted from his grace the man that shivers in rags, and who is destitute of bread. In fact, if there be any distinction made, the distinction is on your side, and for your benefit—"Unto you is the word of salvation sent;" "For the poor have the gospel preached unto them." But especially I must speak to you who are *poor, spiritually.* You have no faith, you have no virtue, you have no good work, you have no grace, and what is poverty worse still, you have no hope. Ah, my Master has sent *you* a gracious invitation Come and welcome to the marriage feast of his love. "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely." Come, I must lay hold upon you, though you be defiled with foulest filth, and though you have nought but rags upon your back, though your own righteousness has become as filthy clouts, yet must I lay hold upon you, and invite you first, and even compel you to come in.

And now I see you again. You are not only poor, but you are *maimed.* There was a time when you thought you could work out your own salvation without God's help, when you could perform good works, attend to ceremonies, and get to heaven by yourselves; but now you are maimed, the sword of the law has cut off your hands, and now you can work no longer; you say, with bitter sorrow—

> "The best performance of my hands,
> Dares not appear before thy throne."

You have lost all power now to obey the law; you feel that when you would do good, evil is present with you. You are maimed; you have given up, as a forlorn hope, all attempt to save yourself, because you are maimed and your arms are gone. But you are worse off than that, for if you could not work your way to heaven, yet you could walk your way there along the road by faith; but you are maimed in the feet as well as in the hands; you feel that you cannot believe, that you cannot repent, that you cannot obey the stipulations of the gospel. You feel that you are utterly undone, powerless in every respect to do anything that can be pleasing to God. In fact, you are crying out—

> "Oh, could I but believe,
> Then all would easy be,
> I would, but cannot, Lord relieve,
> My help must come from thee."

To you am I sent also. Before *you* am I to lift up the blood-stained banner of the cross, to you am I to preach this gospel, "Whoso calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;" and unto you am I to cry "Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.

There is yet another class. You are *halt.* You are halting between two opinions. You are sometimes seriously inclined, and at another time worldly gaiety calls you away. What little progress you do make in religion is but a limp. You have a little strength, but that is so little that you make but painful progress. Ah, limping brother, to you also is the word of this salvation sent. Though you halt between two opinions, the master sends me to you with this message: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if God be God, serve him; if Baal be God, serve him." Consider thy ways; set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. Because I will do this, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel! Halt no longer, but decide for God and his truth.

And yet I see another class,—*the blind.* Yes, you that cannot see yourselves, that

think yourselves good when you are full of evil, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness; to you am I sent. You, blind souls that cannot see your lost estate, that do not believe that sin is so exceedingly sinful as it is, and who will not be persuaded to think that God is a just and righteous God, to you am I sent. To you too that cannot see the Saviour, that see no beauty in him that you should desire him; who see no excellence in virtue, no glories in religion, no happiness in serving God, no delight in being his children; to you, also, am I sent. Ay, to whom am I not sent if I take my text? For it goes further than this—it not only gives a particular description, so that each individual case may be met, but afterwards it makes a general sweep, and says, "Go into the highways and hedges." Here we bring in all ranks and conditions of men—my lord upon his horse in the highway, and the woman trudging about her business, the thief waylaying the traveller—all these are in the highway, and they are all to be compelled to come in, and there away in the hedges there lie some poor souls whose refuges of lies are swept away, and who are seeking now to find some little shelter for their weary heads, to you, also, are we sent this morning. This is the universal command—compel them to come in.

Now, I pause after having described the character, I pause to look at the herculean labour that lies before me. Well did Melanchthon say, "Old Adam was too strong for young Melanchthon." As well might a little child seek to compel a Samson, as I seek to lead a sinner to the cross of Christ. And yet my Master sends me about the errand. Lo, I see the great mountain before me of human depravity and stolid indifference, but by faith I cry, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Does my Master say, compel them to come in? Then, though the sinner be like Samson and I a child, I shall lead him with a thread. If God saith *do* it, if I attempt it in faith *it shall be done*; and if with a groaning, struggling, and weeping heart, I so seek this day to compel sinners to come to Christ, the sweet compulsions of the Holy Spirit shall go with every word, and some indeed shall be compelled to come in.

II. And now to the work—directly to the work. Unconverted, unreconciled, unregenerate men and women, I am to COMPEL YOU TO COME IN. Permit me first of all to accost you in the highways of sin and tell you over again my errand. The King of heaven this morning sends a gracious invitation to you. He says, "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he should turn unto me and live:" "Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow." Dear brother, it makes my heart rejoice to think that I should have such good news to tell you, and yet I confess my soul is heavy because I see you do not think it good news, but turn away from it, and do not give it due regard. Permit me to tell you what the King has done for you. He knew your guilt, he foresaw that you would ruin yourself. He knew that his justice would demand your blood, and in order that this difficulty might be escaped, that his justice might have its full due, and that you might yet be saved, *Jesus Christ hath died.* Will you just for a moment glance at this picture. You see that man there on his knees in the garden of Gethsemane, sweating drops of blood. You see this next; you see that miserable sufferer tied to a pillar and lashed with terrible scourges, till the shoulder bones are seen like white islands in the midst of a sea of blood. Again you see this third picture; it is the same man hanging on the cross with hands extended, and with feet nailed fast, dying, groaning, bleeding; methought the picture spoke and said, "It is finished." Now all this hath Jesus Christ of Nazareth done, in order that God might consistently with his justice pardon sin; and the message to you this morning is this—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." That is trust him, renounce thy works, and thy ways, and set thine heart alone on this man, who gave himself for sinners.

Well brother, I have told you the message, what sayest thou unto it? Do you turn away? You tell me it is nothing to you; you cannot listen to it; that you will hear me by-and-bye; but you will go your ways this day and attend to your farm and merchandize. Stop brother, I was not told merely to tell you and then go about my business. No; I am told to compel you to come in; and permit me to observe to you before I further go, that there is one thing I can say—and to which God is my witness this morning, that I am in earnest with you in my desire that you should comply with this command of God. You may despise your own salva-

tion, but I do not despise it; you may go away and forget what you shall hear, but you will please to remember that the things I now say cost me many a groan ere I came here to utter them. My inmost soul is speaking out to you, my poor brother, when I beseech you by him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, consider my master's message which he bids me now address to you.

But do you spurn it? Do you still refuse it? Then I must change my tone a minute. I will not merely tell you the message, and invite you as I do with all earnestness, and sincere affection—I will go further. Sinner, in God's name I *command* you to repent and believe. Do you ask me whence my authority? I am an ambassador of heaven. My credentials, some of them secret, and in my own heart; and others of them open before you this day in the seals of my ministry, sitting and standing in this hall, where God has given me many souls for my hire. As God the everlasting one hath given me a commission to preach his gospel, I command you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; not on my own authority, but on the authority of him who said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature;" and then annexed this solemn sanction, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Reject my message, and remember "He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God." An ambassador is not to stand below the man with whom he deals, for we stand higher. If the minister chooses to take his proper rank, girded with the omnipotence of God, and anointed with his holy unction, he is to command men, and speak with all authority compelling them to come in: "command, exhort, rebuke with all long-suffering."

But do you turn away and say you will not be commanded? Then again will I change my note. If that avails not, all other means shall be tried. My brother, I come to you simple of speech, and I *exhort* you to flee to Christ. O my brother, dost thou know what a loving Christ he is? Let me tell thee from my own soul what I know of him. I, too once despised him. He knocked at the door of my heart and I refused to open it. He came to me, times without number, morning by morning, and night by night; he checked me in my conscience and spoke to me by his Spirit, and when, at last, the thunders of the law prevailed in my conscience, I thought that Christ was cruel and unkind. O I can never forgive myself that I should have thought so ill of him. But what a loving reception did I have when I went to him. I thought he would smite me, but his hand was not clenched in anger but opened wide in mercy. I thought full sure that his eyes would dart lightning-flashes of wrath upon me; but, instead thereof, they were full of tears. He fell upon my neck and kissed me; he took off my rags and did clothe me with his righteousness, and caused my soul to sing aloud for joy; while in the house of my heart and in the house of his church there was music and dancing, because his son that he had lost was found, and he that was dead was made alive. I exhort you, then, to look to Jesus Christ and to be lightened. Sinner, you will never regret,—I will be bondsman for my Master that you will never regret it,—you will have no sigh to go back to your state of condemnation; you shall go out of Egypt and shall go into the promised land and shall find it flowing with milk and honey. The trials of Christian life you shall find heavy, but you will find grace will make them light. And as for the joys and delights of being a child of God, if I lie this day you shall charge me with it in days to come. If you will taste and see that the Lord is good, I am not afraid but that you shall find that he is not only good, but better than human lips ever can describe.

I know not what arguments to use with you. I appeal to your own self-interests. Oh my poor friend, would it not be better for you to be reconciled to the God of heaven, than to be his enemy? What are you getting by opposing God? Are you the happier for being his enemy? Answer, pleasure-seeker: hast thou found delights in that cup? Answer me, self-righteous man: hast thou found rest for the sole of thy foot in all thy works? Oh thou that goest about to establish thine own righteousness, I charge thee let conscience speak. Hast thou found it to be a happy path? Ah, my friend, "Wherefore dost thou spend thy money for that which is not bread, and thy labour for that which satisfieth not; hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." I exhort you by everything that is sacred and solemn, everything that is important and eternal, flee for your lives, look not behind you, stay not in all the plain, stay

not until you have proved, and found an interest in the blood of Jesus Christ, that blood which cleanseth us from all sin. Are you still cold and indifferent? Will not the blind man permit me to lead him to the feast? Will not my maimed brother put his hand upon my shoulder and permit me to assist him to the banquet? Will not the poor man allow me to walk side-by-side with him? Must I use some stronger words. Must I use some other compulsion to compel you to come in? Sinners, this one thing I am resolved upon this morning, if you be not saved ye shall be without excuse. Ye, from the grey-headed down to the tender age of childhood, if ye this day lay not hold on Christ, your blood shall be on your own head. If there be power in man to bring his fellow, (as there is when man is helped by the Holy Spirit) that power shall be exercised this morning, God helping me. Come, I am not to be put off by your rebuffs: if my exhortation fails, I must come to something else. My brother I ENTREAT you, I entreat you stop and consider. Do you know what it is you are rejecting this morning? You are rejecting Christ, your only Saviour. "Other foundation can no man lay;" "there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved." My brother, I cannot bear that ye should do this, for I remember what you are forgetting: the day is coming when you will want a Saviour. It is not long ere weary months shall have ended, and your strength begin to decline; your pulse shall fail you, your strength shall depart, and you and the grim monster—death, must face each other. What will you do in the swellings of Jordan without a Saviour? Death-beds are stony things without the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an awful thing to die anyhow; he that hath the best hope, and the most triumphant faith, finds that death is not a thing to laugh at. It is a terrible thing to pass from the seen to the unseen, from the mortal to the immortal, from time to eternity, and you will find it hard to go through the iron gates of death without the sweet wings of angels to conduct you to the portals of the skies. It will be a hard thing to die without Christ. I cannot help thinking of you. I see you acting the suicide this morning, and I picture myself standing at your bedside and hearing your cries, and knowing that you are dying without hope. I cannot bear that. I think I am standing by your coffin now, and looking into your clay-cold face, and saying, "This man despised Christ and neglected the great salvation." I think what bitter tears I shall weep then, if I think that I have been unfaithful to you, and how those eyes fast closed in death, shall seem to chide me and say, "Minister, I attended the music hall, but you were not in earnest with me; you amused me, you preached to me, but you did not plead with me. You did not know what Paul meant when he said, 'As though God did beseech you by us we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'"

I entreat you let this message enter your heart for another reason. I picture myself standing at the bar of God. As the Lord liveth, the day of judgment is coming. You believe that? You are not an infidel; your conscience would not permit you to doubt the Scripture. Perhaps you may have pretended to do so, but you cannot. You feel there must be a day when God shall judge the world in righteousness. I see you standing in the midst of that throng, and the eye of God is fixed on you. It seems to you that he is not looking anywhere else, but only upon you, and he summons you before him; and he reads your sins, and he cries, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire in hell!" My hearer, I cannot bear to think of you in that position; it seems as if every hair on my head must stand on end to think of any hearer of mine being damned. Will you picture yourselves in that position? The word has gone forth, "Depart, ye cursed." Do you see the pit as it opens to swallow you up? Do you listen to the shrieks and the yells of those who have preceded you to that eternal lake of torment? Instead of picturing the scene, I turn to you with the words of the inspired prophet, and I say, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Oh! my brother, I cannot let you put away religion thus; no, I think of what is to come after death. I should be destitute of all humanity if I should see a person about to poison himself, and did not dash away the cup; or if I saw another about to plunge from London Bridge, if I did not assist in preventing him from doing so; and I should be worse than a fiend if I did not now, with all love, and kindness, and earnestness, beseech you to "lay hold on eternal life," "to labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life."

Some hyper-calvinist would tell me I am wrong in so doing. I cannot help it.

I must do it. As I must stand before my Judge at last, I feel that I shall not make full proof of my ministry unless I entreat with many tears that ye would be saved, that ye would look unto Jesus Christ and receive his glorious salvation. But does not this avail? are all our entreaties lost upon you; do you turn a deaf ear? Then again I change my note. Sinner, I have pleaded with you as a man pleadeth with his friend, and were it for my *own* life I could not speak more earnestly this morning than I do speak concerning *yours*. I did feel earnest about my own soul, but not a whit more than I do about the souls of my congregation this morning; and therefore, if ye put away these entreaties I have something else;—I must *threaten* you. You shall not always have such warnings as these. A day is coming, when hushed shall be the voice of every gospel minister, at least for you; for your ear shall be cold in death. It shall not be any more threatening; it shall be the fulfilment of the threatening. There shall be no promise, no proclamations of pardon and of mercy; no peace-speaking blood, but you shall be in the land where the Sabbath is all swallowed up in everlasting nights of misery, and where the preachings of the gospel are forbidden because they would be unavailing. I charge you then, listen to this voice that now addresses your conscience; for if not, God shall speak to you in his wrath, and say unto you in his hot displeasure, "I called and ye refused; I stretched out my hand and no man regarded; therefore will I mock at your calamity; I will laugh when your fear cometh." Sinner, I threaten you again. Remember, it is but a short time you may have to hear these warnings. You imagine that your life will be long, but do you know how short it is? Have you ever tried to think how frail you are? Did you ever see a body when it has been cut in pieces by the anatomist? Did you ever see such a marvellous thing as the human frame?

"Strange, a harp of a thousand strings,
Should keep in tune so long."

Let but one of those cords be twisted, let but a mouthful of food go in the wrong direction, and you may die. The slightest chance, as we have it, may send you swift to death, when God wills it. Strong men have been killed by the smallest and slightest accident, and so may you. In the chapel, in the house of God, men have dropped down dead. How often do we hear of men falling in our streets—rolling out of time into eternity, by some sudden stroke. And are you sure that heart of your's is quite sound? Is the blood circulating with all accuracy? Are you quite sure of that? And if it be so, how long shall it be? O, perhaps there are some of you here that shall never see Christmas-day; it may be the mandate has gone forth already, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live." Out of this vast congregation, I might with accuracy tell how many will be dead in a year; but certain it is that the whole of us shall never meet together again in any one assembly. Some out of this vast crowd, perhaps some two or three, shall depart ere the new year shall be ushered in. I remind you, then, my brother, that either the gate of salvation may be shut, or else you may be out of the place where the gate of mercy stands. Come, then, let the threatening have power with you. I do not threaten because I would alarm without cause, but in hopes that a brother's threatening may drive you to the place where God hath prepared the feast of the gospel. And now, *must I turn hopelessly away?* Have I exhausted all that I can say? No, I will come to you again. Tell me what it is, my brother, that keeps you from Christ. I hear one say, "Oh, sir, it is because I feel myself too guilty." That cannot be, my friend, that cannot be. "But, sir, I am the chief of sinners." Friend, you are not. The chief of sinners died and went to heaven many years ago; his name was Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul the apostle. He was the chief of sinners, I know he spoke the truth. "No," but you say still, "I am too vile." You cannot be viler than the *chief* of sinners. You must, at least, be second worst. Even supposing you are the worst now alive, you are second worst, for he was chief. But suppose you are the worst, is not that the very reason why you should come to Christ. The worse a man is, the more reason he should go to the hospital or physician. The more poor you are, the more reason you should accept the charity of another. Now, Christ does not want any merits of your's. He gives freely. The worse you are, the more welcome you are. But let me ask you a question: Do you think you will ever get better by stopping away from Christ? If so, you know very little as yet of the way of salvation at all. No, sir, the longer you stay the worse you will grow; your hope will grow weaker,

your despair will become stronger; the nail with which Satan has fastened you down will be more firmly clenched, and you will be less hopeful than ever. Come, I beseech you, recollect there is nothing to be gained by delay, but by delay everything may be lost. "But," cries another, "I feel I cannot believe." No, my friend, and you never will believe if you look first at your believing. Remember, I am not come to invite you to faith, but am come to invite you to Christ. But you say, "What is the difference?" Why, just this. If you first of all say, "I want to believe a thing," you never do it. But your first inquiry must be, "What is this thing that I am to believe?" Then will faith come as the consequence of that search. Our first business has not to do with faith, but with Christ. Come, I beseech you, on Calvary's mount, and see the cross. Behold the Son of God, he who made the heavens and the earth, dying for your sins, Look to him, is there not power in him to save? Look at his face so full of pity. Is there not love in his heart to prove him *willing* to save? Sure sinner, the sight of Christ will help thee to believe. Do not believe first, and then go to Christ, or else thy faith will be a worthless thing; go to Christ without any faith, and cast thyself upon him, sink or swim. But I hear another cry, "Oh sir, you do not know how often I have been invited, how long I have rejected the Lord" I do not know, and I do not want to know; all I know is that my Master has sent me, to compel you to come in; so come along with you now. You may have rejected a thousand invitations; don't make this the thousandth-and-one. You have been up to the house of God, and you have only been gospel hardened. But do I not see a tear in your eye; Come my brother don't be hardened by this morning's sermon. O, Spirit of the living God come and melt this heart for it has never been melted, and compel him to come in! I cannot let you go on such idle excuses as that; if you have lived so many years slighting Christ, there are so many reasons why now you should not slight him. But did I hear you whisper that this was not a convenient time? Then what must I say to you? When will that convenient time come? Shall it come when you are in hell? Will that time be convenient? Shall it come when you are on your dying bed, and the death throttle is in your throat—shall it come then? Or when the burning sweat is scalding your brow; and then again, when the cold clammy sweat is there, shall those be convenient times? When pains are racking you, and you are on the borders of the tomb? No, sir, this morning is the convenient time. May God make it so. Remember, I have no authority to ask you to come to Christ *to-morrow*. The Master has given you no invitation to come to him next Tuesday. The invitation is, "*To-day* if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation," for the Spirit saith "to-day." "Come *now* and let us reason together;" why should you put it off? It may be the last warning you shall ever have. Put it off, and you may never weep again in chapel. You may never have so earnest a discourse addressed to you. You may not be pleaded with as I would plead with you now. You may go away, and God may say, "He is given unto idols, let him alone." He shall throw the reins upon your neck; and then, mark—your course is sure, but it is sure damnation and swift destruction.

And now again, is it all in vain? Will you not now come to Christ? Then what more can I do? I have but one more resort, and that shall be tried. I can be permitted to weep for you; I can be allowed to pray for you. You shall scorn the address if you like; you shall laugh at the preacher; you shall call him fanatic if you will; he will not chide you, he will bring no accusation against you to the great Judge. Your offence, so far as he is concerned, is forgiven before it is committed; but you will remember that the message that you are rejecting this morning is a message from one who loves you, and it is given to you also by the lips of one who loves you. You will recollect that you may play your soul away with the devil, that you may listlessly think it a matter of no importance; but there lives at least one who is in earnest about your soul, and one who before he came here wrestled with his God for strength to preach to you, and who when he has gone from this place will not forget his hearers of this morning. I say again, when words fail us we can give tears—for words and tears are the arms with which gospel ministers compel men to come in. You do not know, and I suppose could not believe, how anxious a man whom God has called to the ministry feels about his congregation, and especially about some of them. I heard but the other day of a young man who attended here a long time, and his father's hope was that he would be brought to Christ. He became acquainted, however, with an infidel;

and now he neglects his business, and lives in a daily course of sin. I saw his father's poor wan face; I did not ask him to tell me the story himself, for I felt it was raking up a trouble and opening a sore; I fear, sometimes, that good man's grey hairs may be brought with sorrow to the grave. Young men, you do not pray for yourselves, but your mothers wrestle for you. You will not think of your own souls, but your father's anxiety is exercised for you. I have been at prayer meetings, when I have heard children of God pray there, and they could not have prayed with more earnestness and more intensity of anguish if they had been each of them seeking their own soul's salvation. And is it not strange that we should be ready to move heaven and earth for your salvation, and that still you should have no thought for *yourselves*, no regard to eternal things?

Now I turn for one moment to some here. There are some of you here members of Christian churches, who make a profession of religion, but unless I be mistaken in you—and I shall be happy if I am—your profession is a lie. You do not live up to it, you dishonour it; you can live in the perpetual practice of absenting yourselves from God's house, if not in sins worse than that. Now I ask such of you who do not adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour, do you imagine that you can call me your pastor, and yet that my soul cannot tremble over you and in secret weep for you? Again, I say it may be but little concern to you how you defile the garments of your Christianity, but it is a great concern to God's hidden ones, who sigh and cry, and groan for the iniquities of the professors of Zion.

Now does anything else remain to the minister besides weeping and prayer? Yes, there is one thing else. God has given to his servants not the power of regeneration, but he has given them something akin to it. It is impossible for any man to regenerate his neighbour; and yet how are men born to God? Does not the apostle say of such an one that he was begotten by him in his bonds. Now the minister has a power given him of God, to be considered both the father and the mother of those born to God, for the apostle said he travailed in birth for souls till Christ was formed in them. What can we do then? We can now appeal to the Spirit. I know I have preached the gospel, that I have preached it earnestly, I challenge my Master to honour his own promise. He has said it shall not return unto me void, and it shall not. It is in his hands, not mine. I cannot compel you, but thou O Spirit of God who hast the key of the heart, thou canst compel. Did you ever notice in that chapter of the Revelation, where it says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock," a few verses before, the same person is described, as he who hath the key of David. So that if knocking will not avail, he has the key and can and will come in. Now if the knocking of an earnest minister prevail not with you this morning, there remains still that secret opening of the heart by the Spirit, so that you shall be compelled.

I thought it my duty to labour with you as though *I* must do it; now I throw it into my Master's hands. It cannot be his will that we should travail in birth, and yet not bring forth spiritual children. It is with *him;* he is master of the heart, and the day shall declare it, that some of you constrained by sovereign grace have become the willing captives of the all-conquering Jesus, and have bowed your hearts to him through the sermon of this morning.

Counting the Cost

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish"—Luke xiv. 28—30.

THIS passage is peculiar to Luke, and he tells us that at the time when our Lord uttered it great multitudes followed him. It is observable that when our Lord was forsaken by the crowd he was not depressed, and when his ministry became popular he was not elated. He was calm and wise in the midst of the excitement of the thronging multitudes. This passage is sufficient evidence of that fact. On this occasion our Lord spoke with a view to the winnowing of the great heap of nominal discipleship which lay before him, that the chaff might be driven away and only the precious corn might remain. The discourse before us reminds us of Gideon's process of diminishing that vast but motley host of which the Lord said, "The people are too many for me." After having bidden the faint-hearted go, he next brought down the remaining thousands to the river, and bade them drink; and then only kept for himself those who lapped in a certain peculiar manner, which indicated their zeal, their speed, their energy, and their experience. Our Lord tested his followers that he might have only those remaining who would be fit for the conquest of the world. To carry his precious treasure he would select vessels whom grace had made fit for his use, the rest he could dispense with.

Our Lord Jesus was far too wise to pride himself upon the number of his converts; he cared rather for quality than quantity. He rejoiced over one sinner that repented, but ten thousand sinners who merely professed to have repented would have given him no joy whatever. His heart longed after the real, he loathed the counterfeit; he panted after the substance, and the shadow could not content him. His fan was in his hand with which to throughly purge his floor, and his axe was

laid to the root of the trees to hew down the fruitless. He was anxious to leave a living church like good seed-corn in the land, as free as possible from all admixture. Hence in this particular instance one might even think that he was repelling men rather than attracting them to his leadership; but, indeed, he was doing nothing of the kind. He understood right well that men to be truly won must be won by truth, that the truest love is ever honest, and that the best disciple is not he who joins the class of the great Master in a hurry, and then afterwards discovers that the learning is not such as he expected, but one who comes sighing after just such knowledge as the teacher is prepared to give. Moreover, our Lord knew what sometimes we may forget—that there is no heartbreak in the world to the godly worker like that which comes of disappointed hopes, when those who have said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," turn back unto perdition, and when the hot breath which shouted "Hosanna!" turns into the cruel, cold-blooded cry, "Crucify him! crucify him!" Nothing is more injurious to a church than a large dilution with half-hearted members, and nothing more dangerous to the persons themselves than to allow them to put on an untrue profession. Therefore did the Master take most care at the time when that care was most needed, that none should follow him under misapprehension, but should be made fully aware of what was meant by being his disciples, so that they should not say afterwards, "We have been misled; we have been beguiled into a service which disappoints us." Unlike the enlisting sergeant, who sets forth all the glories of military service in glowing colours in order to gain a recruit, the great Captain of our salvation would have his followers take all things into consideration before they cast in their lot with him.

This morning our text may be equally suitable, and its warning may be as necessary and as salutary as when first the Master pronounced it; for great multitudes are just now following Christ, a revival has come and stirred the mass of you. Among the would-be disciples (blessed be God!) are many whom the Lord himself has called, for every one of whom we give most hearty thanks; but with them necessarily, and of course (for when was it ever different?) there are others who are not called of God at all, but who are moved by the natural impulse of imitating others, and stirred by feelings which are none the less fleeting because just now they are intense; and therefore in Christ's name it is ours to address you even as he did, and warn you in his own words: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish."

To assist our memories, we will divide our meditation into three parts. The first will be headed in this manner: *true religion is a costly thing;* the second shall bear this motto: *Wisdom suggests that before we*

enter upon it we should estimate the cost; and the third shall bear this inscription : *Cost what it may, it is worth what it costs.*

I. First, then, it is clear from our text that TRUE RELIGION IS COSTLY. Far be it from us to create any confusion of thought here. The gifts of God's grace cost us nothing, neither could his salvation be purchased with money, nor with merit, nor by vows and penances. "If a man should give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." The gospel motto is, "without money and without price"; we are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Yet, for all that, if a man will be a Christian it will cost him something. Consider a moment. Here is a blind man sitting by the wayside begging; he asks to have his eyes opened. Will it cost him anything? No, the Saviour would not accept all the gold in the world for the cure, he will freely open his eyes; but when they are opened it will cost that blind man something. Obtaining his sight he will be called upon to discharge the duties of one who has eyes. He will not be allowed after that to sit there and beg, or, if he tries to do so, he will lose the sympathy which is bestowed upon blindness; now that his eyes are opened he must use them, and earn his own bread. It will cost him something, for he will now be conscious of the darkness of the night which he knew nothing of before! and there are sad sights which now he must look upon which never grieved him before, for often what the eye does not see the heart does not rue. A man cannot gain a faculty except at some expense; he that increaseth knowledge or the means of gaining it, increaseth both sorrow and duty. Take another case. A poor man is suddenly made a prince: it will cost him the giving up of his former manners, and will involve him in new duties and cares. A man is set on the road to heaven as a pilgrim: does he pay anything to enter by the wicket-gate? I trow not; free grace admits him to the sacred way. But when that man is put on the road to heaven it will cost him something. It will cost him earnestness to knock at the wicket-gate, and sweat wherewith to climb the Hill Difficulty, it will cost him tears to find his roll again when he has lost it in the arbour of ease, it will cost him great care in going down the Valley of Humiliation, it will cost him resistance unto blood when he stands foot to foot with Apollyon in conflict, it will cost him many fears when he has to traverse the Valley of the Shadow of Death, it may cost him his life when he comes to Vanity Fair, if like Faithful he is called to bear testimony at the stake. True religion is the gift of God, and there is nothing we can do to purchase it; at the same time if we receive it certain consequences will flow from it, and we ought to consider whether we shall be able to put up with them.

You may be sure that the cost must be great, since our Lord compares it to the building of a tower. The word here used for "tower" has often been employed to signify a turreted house, a villa, or country mansion. "Which of you," says he to the people, "intending to build for himself a mansion in which to reside at your ease would not first of all count the cost?" The building is to be a costly one. Doddridge is wrong in the supposition that a temporary tower is here intended. That it would cost a considerable sum is clear from the Saviour's

saying that the wise man sits down and counts the cost. He does not merely stand up and pass his hand over his brow, and say, "This tower will cost me so many hundred pounds," but it is to be an elaborate construction, an almost palatial edifice, and therefore he sits down, like a merchant at his desk, and thoughtfully considers the undertaking; he consults the architect and the mason, and calculates what will be the expense of the outer walls, what of the roof, what of the interior fittings, and the like, and he does not make a rough guess, but counts the cost as men count their gold. It is evidently a matter of consequence with him, and so is true religion—it is no trifle, but an all-important business. He who thinks that a careless, hit-or-miss, headlong venture will suffice for his eternal interests is the reverse of wise.

True godliness is the building up of a character which will endure the day of judgment. It begins in laying deep the foundations in faith and love and a renewed heart; it is carried on by the putting patiently and carefully, and often painfully, stone upon stone the materials of the fair edifice, diligently adding "to your faith courage, and to courage knowledge, and to knowledge temperance,and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." Our life-work consists in "building up ourselves in our most holy faith." See ye not that it is a glorious palace to which the Christian character is likened?

But, lest we should still think the expense small, our Lord compares it to a war, and he speaks of the number of troops engaged in that war, showing that it is no petty skirmish of two insignificant tribes; he likens it to a war in which upon one side there is an array of ten thousand, and on the other a host of twenty thousand. Now, warfare is always expensive work; besides the cost for accoutrements and ammunition, there is the cost of human life and blood, there is the removal of strong arms from work at home, and the direr risks of defeat, captivity, and devastation. The Lord compares religion, then, in its externals, to a battle between the gracious man and the evils rampant in the outside world. The disciple of Jesus has to defend himself against a gigantic foe, and he has within himself a power which, so far as he is concerned, is not sufficient for the contest; the odds are fearful—ten thousand against twenty thousand. Well does the Saviour say in the latter case that it is well to sit down to consult. The king with the smaller army consults, asks his sage senators, takes counsel from experience, calls in good advisers, and debates whether the thing can be done or not. So should we consider the matter of our souls, for religion is a costly thing, and not to be entered on, as the Frenchman said, "with a light heart." That light heart cost his nation dear, and so it will ourselves if we indulge it.

We might have inferred this, I think, from some other considerations—namely, first from the fact that true religion is a lasting thing. It lasts for life. False religion comes and goes; true regeneration is never repeated, and it is the commencement of a life which will know no end, either in time or in eternity. Now anything which is to last must be expensive. You shall get your glass coloured, if you will, cheaply, but the sun will soon remove all its beauty. If you would obtain a glass which shall retain its colour for centuries every single

step in the process of its manufacture will be costly, involving much labour and great care. So is it with true religion. You may get it cheap if you will, it will look quite as well as the real thing, and for a little while it will bring you almost all the comfort and respect which the genuine article would have brought you; but it will not last; soon will its colour fly, and the beauty and the excellence, which were there but in pretence, will soon have gone. You want, dear friend, (I am sure you do), you want a godliness which will last you till you die: well, then, it must cost you something, be you sure of that.

Remember also that true religion will have to bear a strain, for it is certain to be opposed. This tower will not be built without opposition. It is like the wall of Jerusalem, Sanballat and Tobias will be sure to hinder the building. True religion must be able to endure hardness: if it cannot do that it is good for nothing. The old Toledo blade cost the warrior much at first hand, but when he had once procured it he knew that it would cut through joint and marrow in the day of battle, and he was not afraid to dash into the thick of the fray, trusting to its unrivalled temper and keen edge. Could he not find a cheaper sword? I ween he could have found it easily enough, and with small expense of gold, but then in the moment when his sword smote upon his enemy's helmet, instead of cleaving through the skull, it snapped in the warrior's hand and cost him his life. Such is the cheap religion with which so many take up; there is no self-denial in it, no forsaking of the world, no giving up of carnal amusements—they are just the same as the world; their religion costs them nothing, and at last when they want it it will fail them, it will snap like the ill-made sword in the day of battle, and leave them defenceless. Oh, if you want that which will endure the conflict you must spend cost upon it. Jesus Christ knew that the persons to whom he spoke would not be able to bear the tests which awaited his disciples; they did not know that he would be crucified, for just then he was popular, and they hoped that he was to be the King of Israel, but the Saviour knew that there would come dark days in which the King of the Jews would be hanged upon a gibbet, and his disciples, even his true ones, would forsake him for the moment and would flee; and therefore he in effect said to them, "You must be prepared for cross-bearing, you must be prepared to follow me amid derision and shame and reproach, and if you are not ready for this your discipleship is a mistake. In their case it did not stand the test, these people were nowhere when the time of trial came.

And remember, dear friends, and I dwell with great emphasis upon this point, we want a religion which will abide the inspection of the great Judge at the last day. Now, there are things in the world which will endure for awhile, but if they are closely looked at, and especially if they are placed under a microscope, they will be seen to have many flaws: now, no microscopical examination can for a moment be compared with the glance of Jehovah, he will read us through and through. Oh, what a withering will there be for fair professions in the day when his fiery eye shall gaze upon them. Never does the grass dry up under the sirocco one-half so swiftly as the fair plains of pretended Christianity will wither beneath the divine glance in the last

tremendous day. He will look upon what men call Christendom, and it will almost if not altogether vanish; for "when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?" Will it not, then, be evidently true that "many are called, and but few are chosen"? "Strive to enter in at the strait gate," is still the voice of Christ to all of us, "for many shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able." If our religion is to be weighed in the balances, and may perchance be found wanting, it is well for us to see to it, and to know that it must be sincere, genuine, and costly, if it is to pass that ordeal.

What, then, is the expense? What is the cost of building this tower or fighting this war? The answer is given by our Saviour, not by me. I should not have dared to invent such tests as he has ordained; it is for me to be the echo of his voice and no more. What does he say? Why, first, that if you would be his, and have his salvation, you must love him beyond every other person in this world. Is not that the meaning of this expression, "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother"? Dear names! Dear names! "Father and mother!" Lives there a man with soul so dead that he can pronounce either of these words without emotion, and especially the last—"mother"? Men and brethren, this is a dear and tender name to us, it touches a chord which thrills our being; yet far more powerful is the name of Saviour, the name of Jesus. Less loved must father and mother be than Jesus Christ. The Lord demands precedence also of the best beloved "wife." Here he touches another set of heart-strings. Dear is that word "wife," partner of our being, comfort of our sorrow, delight of our eyes—"wife!" Yet, wife, thou must not take the chief place, thou must sit at Jesus' feet, or else thou art an idol, and Jesus will not brook thy rivalry. And "children," the dear babes that nestle in the bosom, and clamber to the knee and pronounce the parent's name in accents of music, they must not be our chief love, they must not come in between us and the Saviour, nor for their sakes, to give them pleasure or to promote their worldly advantage, must we grieve our Lord. Many a child is master of his father, many a daughter has been mistress to the mother; but if it be for evil, this must be ended at once. If they tempt us to evil they must be treated as if we hated them; yea, the evil in them must be hated for Christ's sake. If ye be Christ's disciples your Lord must be first, then mother, father, wife, children, brethren, and sisters will follow in due rank and order.

I am afraid that many professors are not prepared for this. They would be Christians if their family would approve, but they must consult their brother, father, or wife. They would make a stand against worldly pleasures if others would, but they cannot bear to appear singular, or to oppose the views of relatives. They say, "My father wishes it, and I dare not tell him that it is wrong" "My mother says that we must not be too strait-laced, and therefore, though my conscience tells me it is wrong, yet will I do it;" or else they say, "My girls are growing up and must have amusement, and my boys must be allowed their pleasures, and therefore I must wink at sin." Ah, my brethren, this must not be, if you are indeed Christ's disciples. You must put them all aside, the dearest must go sooner than Jesus be

forsaken; for does he not say in the Psalms, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him"? Mark you, you will best prove your love to your relatives by being decided for the right, since you will be the more likely to win their souls. Love them too much to indulge the wrong in them; love them so truly that you hate that in them which would injure you and ruin them. You must be prepared to suffer from those who are bound to you by the dearest ties; sin must not be tolerated whatever may happen. We cannot yield in the point of sin, our determination is invincible; come hate or come love, we must follow Christ.

The next item of cost is this—self must be hated. I am afraid there are some who would sooner hate father or wife than hate their own life. Yet such is the demand. It means this: that wherein my own pleasure, or my own gain, or my own repute, or even my own life shall come in the way of Christ's glory, I am so little to make any account of myself, that I must even hate myself if self shall stand in the way of Christ. I am to look upon father, mother, brother, sister, and myself also, as foes, so far as they are opposed to the Lord Jesus and his holy will. I am to love them and desire their good as I also desire good for myself, but I am not to desire any good for them or for myself at the cost of sinning, and robbing the Lord Jesus of his glory. As for myself, if I see anything in myself opposed to Jesus I must away with it. I must mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts, denying myself anything and everything which would grieve the Saviour, or would prevent my realising perfect conformity to him.

Next, the Saviour goes on to say that if we would follow him we must bear our cross: "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Sometimes that cross comes in the shape of confessing our faith before gainsayers. "Ah," says the timid heart, "if I do so I shall have all my friends against me." Take up your cross! it is a part of the cost of true discipleship. "I shall scarcely be able to bear myself in the house if I avow my religion." Take up your cross! my brother, or you cannot be Christ's disciple. "Well, but it will involve a change even in my daily life." Make the change, my brother, or you cannot be the Lord's disciple. "But I know there is one very dear whom I have looked upon as likely to be my future companion, and he will leave me if I forsake the ways of the world." Then, heavy as the loss may be, let him go, if it be so that you cannot follow Christ and unite with him; for Jesus you must follow, or be lost for ever. What trying words these are! What detectors of the hypocrisy of many professing Christians! Did they ever separate from the world? No, not they; they fall in with its fashions as the dead fish floats with the current. Have they any cross to bear? Does anybody reproach them with being too rigid, and too puritanical? Oh, no! for theirs is the religion which the world praises, and consequently the religion which God abhors. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him, and he who has the smile of the ungodly must look for the frown of God.

But, more than this, the Saviour, as another item of cost, requires

that his disciple should take up his cross, and *come after him:* that is to say, he must act as Christ acted. If we are not prepared to make Christ our example, yea, if it be not our highest ambition to live as he lived, to give ourselves up to act as he did, we cannot be his disciples.

Last of all, we must make an unreserved surrender of all to Jesus. Listen to these words: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." It may yet come to this, that persecution may arise, and you may have actually to give up all. You must be prepared for the event. You may not have to give up anything, but the surrender must be just as real in your heart as if it had to be carried out in act and deed. No man has truly given himself to Christ unless he has also said, "My Lord, I give to thee this day my body, my soul, my powers, my talents, my goods, my house, my children, and all that I have. Henceforth I will hold them at thy will, as a steward under thee. Thine they are—as for me, I have nothing, I have surrendered all to thee." You cannot be Christ's disciples at any less expense than this: if you possess a farthing that is your own and not your Master's, Christ is not your Master. It must be all his, every single jot and tittle, and your life also, or you cannot be his.

These are very searching words, but I would remind you once again that they are none of mine. If in expounding them I have erred, I am grieved that it should be so, but I am persuaded I have not erred on the side of too great severity. I confess I may have spoken too leniently. The words of the text lay the axe to the root, and are sweeping to the last degree. Oh, count ye, then, the cost! and if any of you have taken up a religion which costs you nothing, put it down and flee from it, for it will be your curse and your ruin.

Is there any getting to heaven without this cost? No. But may we not be Christians without these sacrifices? You may be counterfeits, you may be hypocrites, you may be brethren of Judas, but you cannot be real Christians. This cost is unavoidable, it cannot be bated one solitary mite. God grant you may be enabled to submit to it.

II. The second head is this, WISDOM SUGGESTS THAT WE SHOULD COUNT THE COST. You feel you would like to be a Christian. Dear friend, give me thy hand. I am glad thou hast such a liking. But as I grasp thy hand and would fain draw thee towards Christ, I look thee in the face and say, "Dost thou know what thou desirest? Art thou sure thou desirest it? There are men lying on beds of sickness who cry for help, but when they recover and have to go out and battle with the world, the time may come when they will say, "I would as leave be on the bed of sickness again." I should not like a time to come when any one of you shall say, "I joined the church, but it was a mistake. I did not weigh the matter rightly. I am now in for it, and I am sorry I am, for I ought not to be where I am." If honest, you ought to give up your profession, if such is the case. If you have no grace, I hope you will have enough of common honesty not to stick to a practical falsehood. I should grieve indeed if that should happen, and therefore this morning, I pray you, count the cost. For mark, if you do not count the cost, you will not be able to carry out your resolves. It is a great building, it is a great war. No mistake can be greater than the notion

that in order to be saved there is only needed a measure of emotion during a few days, and the belief of some one decisive hour. If I preached such doctrines I should be deceiving your souls. Faith and repentance are not the work of a week or two, they are a life-work; as long as the Christian is on earth he must repent; and as for faith, it is not saying "I believe in Jesus, and therefore I am saved," but it is a daily grace, the trust of a lifetime; the Christian continues still to believe and repent until he commences to triumph in eternal glory. Moreover, faith is continually productive of sanctifying results upon the life of the believer, or otherwise he is not possessed of the right faith. He who believes in Jesus Christ is saved; but if there were such a thing as a temporary faith there would be such a thing as a temporary salvation. He who truly repents of sin is a renewed man, but if repentance of sin were only a transient thing, and were soon over, the life which it indicated would be over too. You must not be content with false and fleeting religion. You are beginning to build a tower of which the topstone will never be laid till you are taken up to heaven, and yon are commencing a war which will never end till you exchange the sword for the palm branch.

Remember, also, that to fail in this great enterprise will involve terrible defeat, for what says our Lord? He says that not to be able to finish will expose you to ridicule. I beg you to notice the form of that ridicule. "All that pass by will begin to mock him, saying one to another (for that is the force of the expression) this man began to build but was not able to finish." Our Lord does not represent them as saying to the foolish builder, "You began to build and were not able to finish," but as speaking about him as a third person—"This man." Now, half-hearted Christians, half-hearted religious men, may not be scoffed at in the public streets to their faces, but they are common butts of ridicule behind their backs. You false professors are universally despised. Worldlings laughingly say, "Ah, these are pretty specimens of church members!" The world looks upon a worldly church with utter disdain, and for my part little do I regret that such derision is poured upon an object which so well deserves it. To be a mere pretender to Christian discipleship is to become an object of scorn in time and in eternity, and such will be the false professor's fate. Sir, if you mean to be a Christian, resolve that it shall be the right thing, thorough and decided; for then though men will not go about and praise you to your face, they will honour you, and even those who hate you will know your value; but if you are only half a Christian, and not thorough, they may not come to your face and show their contempt, but as they pass by they will sneer, and will have more respect for a downright worldling than for you, because he is what he says he is, and makes no pretence of being anything else, but as for you, you began to build and could not finish. What a wretched object is a sham Christian! We have sometimes seen great buildings which have been commenced and deserted by over speculative persons, and the neighbours have called them "Smith's Folly," or "Brown's Folly," or "Robinson's Folly," or the like; these are but fleeting causes of derision; but the pretender, the man who in appearance commenced to be a Christian and then broke down at it,

will be pointed at even by the lost in hell. The drunkard will cry, "And you? Have you also come hither? you who were so eloquent about sobriety, and so ready to rebuke the tippler." "Aha!" cries another, "you are the man who lived down our street, and made so much show of your religion; you told me I was very wicked, but what are you better off than I am?" Behold, I see the openly profane upraise themselves from their racks of remorse to exclaim, "Art thou become like one of us? Thou church-member, art thou in hell? Is the taste of the sacramental wine upon thy lips still? Wherefore, then, dost thou demand a drop of water to cool thy tongue? That sacramental bread which thou didst swallow so readily, does it not even now stick in thy hypocritical throat? Thou liar before God and man, meet and right is it that thou art cast out even as we." Oh, if you must be lost, be lost as anything but hypocrites; if you must perish, perish rather outside the church than in it. Do not ape the Lord of glory! I know of no worse act than to mimic the excellences of the Saviour with pert imitation of his graces. What worse offence can you render to the majesty of his sacred virtue than to travesty his holiness and ape his perfection?

III. The last word shall be this, that COST WHATEVER IT MAY, TRUE RELIGION IS WORTH THE COST. We are like a man with the black pest upon him who knows that he is dying, and yet yonder is a drug which will heal him. "Physician," says he, "you ask so great a price that each drop costs me a diamond; you are demanding more than its weight in choicest pearls, but it does not matter, I must have it. If I do not I am a dead man, and then what will it profit me that I have kept my gold?" It is the case of every one of us here present, we must have Christ or perish for ever, and it will be better for us to cut off our right arm and to pluck out our right eye than that we should be cast into hell fire.

Mark you, brethren, the present blessings of true religion are worth all the cost. What if I have to rend some fond connection? Jesus, thou art better to me than husband, wife, or child. If it must be so that she who lies in my bosom shall count me for her enemy thou shalt be in my heart, my Saviour, better than a Rachel, or a Rebekah. Yes, if it must be so that the father shall say, "You shall never darken my doors again if you follow Christ," he must say it, for when father and mother forsake me the Lord will take me up. The immediate joy will recompense for the immediate loss, yea, doubtless you may count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord, and yet remain a gainer.

And again, what recompense comes for all cost in the consolation afforded by true godliness in the article of death? To lie a-dying, why it will give no pain to be able to say then, "I was cast out of my family for Jesus." It will be no sorrow to remember, "I was ridiculed for Christ." It will cause us no pangs to say, "I was counted too precise and too much of a Puritan." No, my brethren, those are not the things which put thorns into death pillows. Oh, no! there we shall see how sweet it was to have borne any part of Jesus' cross; a sliver of his cross will be worth a king's ransom on a dying day. Moreover, at the judgment, when the trumpet rings out, and the dead

are rising, we shall not say, "I suffered too much for Christ." When to the right his chosen go, and we among them, we shall not look back with regret to the fact that we lost caste in society and position amongst the refined for Jesus' sake. We shall not lament that we attended a despised conventicle, and worshipped among the poor of this world out of love to Jesus, and fidelity to his gospel. Oh, no! I warrant you in that day he shall shine brightest who was most beclouded for his Lord's sake. Midst the bright ones, doubly bright shall be the martyr band of whom the world was not worthy, who were accounted as the offscouring of all things; and while each one of the disciples shall receive a hundredfold for all he may have given up for his Lord's cause, these shall have the fairest portion.

Moreover, let me remind you, beloved, that Christ asks you to give up nothing that will injure you. If you must hate father and mother it is only in this sense, that you will not yield to their wrong requests, nor will you leave Christ for them. If you must give up any pleasure it is because it is not a fitting pleasure for you, it is poisonous sugar of lead, and not true sweetness. Christ will give you greater enjoyments by far.

Moreover, I remember that our Redeemer does not ask any one of us to do what he has not done himself. That thought pierces me to the quick, I wish it might affect you also. Master, dost thou say, give up father? Didst thou not leave thy Father? Dost thou bid me even leave my father's house if it must be for thy sake? Didst thou not leave the glorious mansions of heaven? What if I be called to bear reproach? They called the Master of the house Beelzebub. What if I be cast out? They also cast thee out. When we think of the scourgings, and the shame, and the spitting which the Lord endured, what are our griefs? And if for his sake we should even be condemned to death we know how he hung on the cross, stripped of his all, that he might save us from the wrath to come. O believer, can you follow your Lord whithersoever he goeth? Soldiers of the cross, can you follow him? Is the path smooth enough for those dear feet and too rough for you? There is he in the centre of the battle where the blows fall fastest, will you follow him? Dare you follow him, or do you pine for the tents of ease, and the soft couches of the cowards yonder who are shrinking back, and deserting to the enemy? Oh, by everything that is good, if you be indeed his followers, I charge you cry, "Where he is, there let his servant be, as he fares so let his servant fare; in this world be ours his humiliation that in the world to come we may be partakers of his glory."

This is strong preaching, you tell me, but the Saviour meant all that I have said. His was a testing discourse, but there are truths to be remembered which may console us while hearing them. It is true that *you* cannot build the tower; Joshua said to the people in his time, "Ye cannot serve the Lord." If you have counted the cost, you know by this time that you cannot wage the war. Ten thousand cannot stand against twenty thousand. But yet it must be done, inevitable necessity drives on behind; whatever may be in front, we dare not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. What, then, must we do? Hear ye the Lord's words, "With men it is impossible, but with God all

things are possible." Are you willing? Then the Spirit of God will help you. You shall give up the world and the flesh without a sigh; you shall fight against your lusts and you shall overcome them through the blood of the Lamb. The tower shall be built and the Lord shall inhabit it. Cast yourselves on Jesus by a simple faith: rest in his power, and from day to day believe in his strength, and he will bear you safely through.

Do you notice the verse which follows this passage? I wonder whether anything like it will follow my sermon. It is astonishing that though Jesus thundered out as from the top of Sinai, and his words seemed harsh, yet it is written, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him," as if they said to themselves, "This man tells us the truth, therefore we will hear him." And then he began to tell them the precious truths of his free grace, acting just as the husbandman does who puts in the plough and turns up the soil; and when he sees the clods breaking in the furrow then he scatters the golden seed, but not till then. Ho, every one of you who would have Christ, come, and have him! You who would have salvation, accept it as the gift of his sovereign grace; but do not receive it under misapprehension; understand what is meant by it. Salvation is not deliverance from hell alone; it is deliverance from sin. It is not the rescue of men from eternal pain merely; it is their redemption from this world's vain and wicked ways. It cannot be divided, it is a garment without seam, woven from the top throughout If you would have justification, you must have sanctification: if you would have pardon, you must have holiness; if you would be one with Christ, you must be separate from sinners. If you would walk the streets of gold above, you must walk the road of holiness below. God grant you his Holy Spirit to enable you so to do, and his shall be the praise for ever. Amen.

Consider Before You Fight

"What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace."—Luke xiv. 31, 32.

EVERY sensible man endeavours to adapt his purposes to his strength. He does not begin to build a house which he will not be able to finish, nor commence a war which he cannot hope to fight through. The religion of Christ is the most reasonable one in the world, and Jesus Christ never desires to have any disciples who shall blindly follow him without counting the cost. We always esteem it to be a happy thing when we can get men to sit down and consider. The most of you are so full of other thoughts, so occupied with the world, ever running hither and thither about your ordinary business, that we cannot get you to think, or calmly sit down, and soberly look at things as in the light of eternity, and weigh them deliberately as you ought. And yet it is only reasonable that the Master should ask of you to do for him with regard to your own spiritual matters, what you will admit that every sensible man does in his business continually. You are poor traders if you never have any stock-takings: you are likely to be ere long in the bankruptcy court if there is no periodical examination of accounts; and so Christ would have you sit down sometimes, and take stock, as to where you are, and what you are, and then to figure up by some sort of arithmetic by which you may come to a truthful calculation, what you are able to do, and what not to do, and what therefore it is reasonable for you to undertake, and what unreasonable, and where your position ought, and where it ought not to be.

I especially invite this evening, those who are unconverted in this assembly, to some few thoughts upon the war in which they are engaged with God, hoping that peradventure if they consider a little upon it, they will send an ambassage, and desire peace. When I have spoken upon that, there will be some, perhaps, who will be running away with the idea that they will at once be at peace with God, and make war with

Satan; but I shall want to pin them down a moment, and make them estimate their chances of victory in such a war as that, and see whether they are able to meet the black prince of darkness in their own strength. We will try if we cannot make it to-night the subject of a little homely talk about our souls, and a little earnest personal consideration about our future.

I. First, then, THERE ARE SOME HERE WHO ARE NOT THE FRIENDS OF GOD, and in this case he that is not with him is against him.

If you cannot look up to God, and say, "My Father," and feel that your heart beats true to him, then remember it is a fact that you are his enemy. If you could have what you wish there would be no God. If it were in your power you would never trouble yourself again with thoughts of him. You would like to live, you say, as you list, and I know how you would list to live. It would be anyhow, rather than as God commands. Now, as you are engaged in antagonism with him, just think awhile—Can you expect to succeed? Are you likely to win the day? You have entered into a conflict with his law; you do not intend to keep it; with his day, you do not regard it; you are thus at war with God. Now, is it likely that you will be successful? Is there a chance for you? If there be, why then, perhaps, it may be as well to go on. If you can conquer him, if the battlements of glory may yet see the flag of sin waved triumphant there, why, man, then try it. There will be at least an ambition worthy of Satan who desired sooner to reign in hell than to be ruled by heaven. But is there any hope for you? Let me put a few things before you which may, perhaps, make you think the conflict too unequal and thus lead you to abandon the thought at once.

Think of God's *stupendous power!* What is there which he cannot do? We see but little of God's power comparatively in our land. Now and then there comes a crash of thunder in a storm, and we look up with amazement when he sets the heavens on a blaze with his lightning. But go, and do business on the deep waters; let your vessel fly before the howling hurricane; mark how every staunch timber seems to crack as though it were but match-board, and the steady mast goes by the board, and snaps, and is broken to shivers. Mark what God does when he stirs up the great deep, and seems to bring heaven down, and lift the earth up till the elements mingle in a common mass of tempest. Then go to the Alps, and listen to the thunder of the avalanche. Stand amazed, as you look down some grim precipice, or peer with awe-struck wonder into the blue mysteries of a crevasse; see the leaping cataracts, and mark those frozen seas, the glaciers, as they come sweeping down the mountain side; stay awhile till a storm shall gather there, and Alp shall talk to Alp, and those white prophetic heads shall seem to bow while the wings of tempest cover them! There you may learn something of the power of God amidst the crash of nature. If you could have stood by the side of Dr. Woolfe, when rising early one morning, he went out of Aleppo, and upon turning his head, saw that Aleppo was no more, it having been in a single moment swallowed up by an earthquake, then again you might see what God can do. But why need I feebly recapitulate what you all know so well? Think of what that Book records of his deeds of prowess, when he unloosed the depths, and bade the fountains of the great deep be broken up, that the whole

world that then was, might be covered with water. Think of what he did at the Red Sea, when the depths stood upright as an heap for a time, while his people went through, and when afterwards with eager joy the floods clasped their hands, and buried the foemen in the deep, never to rise again! Let such names as Og, king of Bashan, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Sennacherib, the mighty, rise before your recollection, and mark what God has done! Who has ever dashed upon the bosses of his buckler without being wounded? What iron has he not broken? What spear has he not shivered? Millions came against him, but by the blast of the breath of his nostrils they fell, or they flew, like the chaff before the wind. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, but the rocks stand still, and hurl off the waves in flakes of foam, and so doth God, when his foes are most enraged, and passionate. He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh; the Lord doth have them in derision; and he breaketh them in pieces without a stroke of his hand, or even the glance of his eye. Think, sinner, think, of him with whom thou contendest. Hast thou an arm like God's? Canst thou thunder with a voice like his? Canst thou stamp with thy foot, and shake the mountains? Canst thou touch the hills, and make them smoke? Canst thou say to the sea, "Be stirred to thy depths," or canst thou call to the winds, and bid the steeds of tempest be unloosed? If thou canst not, then think of the battle! Attempt to do no more but hie thee back to thy bed, and there commune with thine heart, and make thy peace with him, against whom thou canst not hope successfully to contend.

Think, again, O rebellious man, you have to deal not only with almighty, but with an ever *encompassing power*. Please to think how much you are in God's power to-night as it regards your temporal position. You are prospering in business; but the tide of prosperity may be turned in a way unknown to you. God has a thousand ways of stripping those whom he aforetime seemed to clothe most lavishly. You doat upon that wife of yours: she may be smitten before your eyes, and waste with consumption or decline, or, more rapidly still, she may be taken from you at a stroke, and then where is your joy? Those children, those happy prattlers who make glad your hearth; could you hold them for a moment, if God should call back their spirits? If he said, "Return ye children of men," your prayers, the physician, your love—what could all these avail you? You have but to buy the coffin, and the shroud, and the grave, and bury your dead out of your sight. God can sweep away all, if he will, and leave you penniless, childless, a widower, without comfort in the world. I would not contend with him who has so many ways to wound me. I am vulnerable at so many points, and he knows how to pierce me to the quick in them all. I will, therefore, make him my friend rather than my foe. I had better not strive with him who has the key of the postern, and of the front gate, and of the iron gate, and who can storm every position along my bastion whenever he shall please.

Think, again, how much you are personally in his hand! You are strong you say; you will do a day's work with any man; there are few can lift a load more readily than you can perhaps, and yet one second would be enough to paralyse every limb. Your faculties are clear; you can write with perspicuity, no one can see through an intricate

account more rapidly than you can, or find out a secret more speedily; and yet one tick of that clock is time enough to reduce either you or me to a drivelling idiot, or to a raving madman. A mysterious hand falls on that brain, and cools it, so that there is no longer the light of intellect within it, or else an awful breath fans its flame, till it burns like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace, and the soul walks within it a martyr, doomed to live in the midst of fire. Think of this—not many yards from here there stands in Bedlam an awful proof of what the Providence of God can do in one moment with those who seemed the most sane, the most witty, and the most able of men; and you have not to go far in either direction, before at the gate of some hospital, you will find how soon the body may become very, very low, even to the dust, if God but will it. I would not, O sinner, I would not have God other than my friend, while I am thus helplessly in his control. If the moth is in my hand, and I can crush it at my will and pleasure, surely if that moth had wit and sense, it would not provoke me to anger, nor seek to bring down my plagues upon it, but, if it could, it would seek to nestle near my heart, that I, so able to crush it, might use my power for its protection, and might make what wit I have to be its wisdom for its shelter and defence.

It is well also to remember the *mighty army* of the Lord of Hosts, and that you live amidst the creatures of God who all are ready to do his bidding. As the children of Israel journeyed in the wilderness, they were preserved by God from many foes and innumerable dangers which lurked around, waiting to destroy them. Once God gave the fiery serpents permission to assault the host, and what death and terror immediately filled the camp! They must have seen then, that it was no small thing to be at variance with God, when he had so many allies waiting to do his bidding. How clearly this was shown in the plagues of Egypt, when frogs, locusts, and lice, hail and fire, plague and death, flooded the ill-fated land, when beckoned on by the uplifted finger of God. He can still call to his help the forces of creation. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera, and God can still make all things work for evil as well as good, if he be pleased to command them. When Herod strove with God, he was smitten of worms and died, and God has still a countless army of servants who do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. You had better wait awhile and think how you can meet them. Are your friends as numerous? Can you muster an army like unto God's? Is the muster-roll of your hosts like unto his? Consider the heavens, for he marshalleth yon starry multitude and calleth them all by names; because he is great in strength, not one faileth. Be wise and enter into covenant with him through blood, and rush not on to certain defeat by seeking to outrival God.

Remember moreover what is the extent of *God's wisdom*, and that his foolishness is greater than your highest knowledge. A good general is worth more than a regiment of men. When Stonewall Jackson was killed, his enemies and friends alike felt that his death was more than the loss of ten thousand men. Our Iron Duke, when alive, was a strength to our army beyond all calculation. Now mark the skill and infinite wisdom of the God who leads the army of the skies. All

light and knowledge are his. He is the Ancient of days, and his experience runs back to all eternity. You are but of yesterday and know nothing. His plans are beyond your conception, but he knoweth the way you take. He is far above your thoughts and ever out of your sight; but he can see you through and through, and knoweth you better than you know yourself. Do not show your folly by weighing your wisdom against his in the scales, or by expecting to outshine him so as to triumph over him. Poor moth rushing into the flame, you will be consumed amidst the pity of good men and the derision of evil ones.

Yet there is another matter I want you to recollect, you that are the enemies of God—that you have a *conscience*. You have not got rid of it yet. You have a thief in that candle of the Lord it is true, but still it is alight. It is not put out; and God has ways of making it to become a terrible plague to you, if you do not accept it as a friend. Conscience is meant to be man's armour-bearer, beneath whose shield he may fight the battles of the right, but if you make it your enemy, then conscience often places a sword in such a way as to cut and wound you severely. You have a conscience, and that is a very awkward thing for a man to have who is an enemy of God. If I were God's enemy, I should prefer having no monitor to call my attention to the holy character and righteous law of the Most High; I should be glad to get rid of every particle of moral sense. But you have consciences, and most of you are not yet dead to all feeling of guilt and shame, you cannot, therefore, sin so cheaply as others; and if you do for the present manage to put Mr. Conscience down, yet since he is still in you, the time will come when you will find his voice grow louder, and there will be a terror in that voice which will make it a terror for you to sleep, and hard for you to go about your daily business with your accustomed regularity. Those men who serve God most faithfully, yet find that their conscience, when it can accuse them of anything wrong, though it is their best friend, is no very pleasant companion. It is said that David's heart smote him. I would sooner have anybody smite me than my own heart, for it strikes with so hard a blow, and hits the place where one may most tenderly feel it. And it will be so with you unless you get your "conscience seared with a hot iron." I am afraid there will come a time when you will not rest in your beds, nor be able anywhere to find peace or satisfaction. I think therefore, if I had a friend of God inside my heart, I would not like to fight with God, so long as he continued within me. Oh, that you would be at peace with him, "and thereby good shall come unto you."

One other reflection, for I must not keep you thinking on this point long, it is this. Remember *you must die*, and therefore, it is a pity to be at enmity with God. You may put it off, and say, "I shall not die yet;" but you do not know. How can you tell? It is possible that you may die to-morrow. But suppose that you live for the next twenty or thirty years; why what is that? I am only some thirty years of age, and yet I confess that I never thought time so short as I feel it to be now. When we were children, we thought twelve months a great length of time; when we were twenty, a year seemed to be a very respectable period; but now it flies, and some of my friends here, whose hair is turning grey, will tell you that whether it is fifty, sixty, or seventy

years, it all seems but a mere dream, a snap of the finger, it is gone so soon. Well, just push through a little interval of time, then you must die. My dear friend, will it not be a very dreadful thing to die when you are at war with God? If you could fight this out for ever under such circumstances as those in which you now are, I could not then commend the struggle, but since it must come to such an awful pause, since there must be that death-rattle in your throat, since there must be that clammy sweat upon your brow, O you will want some better business than to be carrying arms against the God of heaven in your dying moments. They that have God for their friend, yet find death no very pleasant task, but what will *you* find it, who will have to strike yourselves in every blow that you are aiming against the Most High, whom you have made, and continue to make your enemy.

Here is this, too, to think of, there is a *future state*, so that when you die, you have to live again. We know very little about that next state, and I do not intend to say much about it to-night. You are launched without your body, an unclothed spirit, into a world which you have never seen. Will you find companions there, or will you be alone? Where will it be? What sort of place will it be like? I should not choose to enter upon the realm of spirits without having God to be my friend; for it were a dreadful thing to get into that mysterious unknown country, having nothing to take with me across its bourne except this,—an inveterate enmity to the King that reigns supreme in it. If I must cross the border, and go into a land I have never trodden, I would like, at least, to carry a passport with me, or to be able to say, "I am a friend of the King that reigns here;" but to go there as God's enemy—why how terrible it must be!

Besides, let me say, you cannot hope to succeed, *all experience is against you*; there never was one yet, that either in this state or the next has fought with God, and conquered, and you will not be the first; for they who contend with God all come to this one conclusion: "He comes forth in his strength, and his enemies are given like stubble to the fire, and like wax to the flame: he lifteth up his voice, and they melt away: he looks at them, and that one flash of fire withers them for ever, and out of the bottomless pit of despair they weep and wail the piteous but useless regret, that their harvest is past, and their summer is ended, and that they are not saved; for they have spent their strength against their God, and so have brought themselves where ruin is eternal, and hope can never come." Oh that thou wouldst send an ambassage, and be at peace!

Methinks, I hear some say, "Well, we wish to give up the contest; but what is to be done, so as to be at peace with God?" I ask, Have you got an ambassador to go to God for you? That is the first thing. He cannot look at *you*. Jesus Christ is the Ambassador between God and man: can you commit your case into his hand? Will you do so? If so, your case will speed well. God cannot deny him any request. He has a right to all he ever asks the Father to give, and the Father is always well pleased in him, and delighteth to grant him whatever he desires. That Saviour is willing to plead your cause. He waiteth to be gracious. I am sent to tell you the good news of his love and mercy; to warn you

of the certain doom which awaits all who turn from Christ; and to bid you and every sin-sick rebel to come at once, just as you are, to the footstool of mercy; and I can pledge the honour of God, (as being Christ's ambassador for this purpose,) that if you come, he will in no wise cast you out. And the terms of peace are very brief. They are these: *give up the traitors;* there can be no peace between you and God while you harbour sin. Give them up, and be willing to renounce every sin of every sort and kind, for one harboured traitor will prevent God concluding peace with you.

Sinner, what sayest thou? Is it hard to give up thy sin? Does that condition strike thee as unreasonable? Out with the knife, man, and cut the throat of every iniquity. Why, there is no sin for which it is worth your while to be damned. A little rioting, and chambering, and wantonness—is that worth hell-fire for ever? What, to have thy giddy amusements for an hour or two, is this a due recompense for an eternity of fire unmitigated by a drop of water? I pray thee, be reasonable. Barter not away thy soul for trifles; pawn not eternity for the mere fictions of an instant. God give thee grace, sinner, not to kick at that condition, but at once cast out your enemies and gods, and then *lay hold on Christ,* on Jesus Christ alone, and let him stand as Ambassador for thee. Thou canst not fight it out. Let peace be made. Oh may it be made to-night, through the blood of Jesus Christ, God's dear Son.

Then next, *confess* that you deserve the King's wrath. Bow that head; put the rope about your neck as though you felt you deserved that the executioner should lead you forth. *Pray to God* for pardon, and cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" and then cling to the skirts of that appointed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who on yonder bloody tree made expiation for the sin of God's enemies, that they might thereby become God's friends. God demands of you a confession of your guilt. He will be honoured by your humbling yourself before him. Your sin has aimed at his glory, and now he will glorify himself by your repentance. It were only just on his part if he spurned you away, and cast you out into the pit which hath no bottom, but he has said that whoso confesseth his sin shall obtain forgiveness. Go, therefore, in the spirit of the publican, smite upon your breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Confess that you deserve hell, but ask for heaven, and you shall not plead in vain. Only honour God's justice, and appeal to his mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. This, surely, is not much for God to expect at your hands. If you will not submit, what can you say when God shall crush you? You refuse to bend the knee, and to bow the head; what will you do when God shall trample on you in his fury, and tread you in his hot displeasure? You must, therefore, now in the accepted time, while it is still the day of mercy, seek his face, and with weeping and supplication "take with you words, and turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

II. And now we turn the subject, so as to look at THE SECOND CONTEST, IN WHICH I TRUST MANY ARE ANXIOUS TO BE ENGAGED.

Some young spirit that has been touched with a sense of its own condition, and somewhat aroused, may be saying, "I will be God's enemy no longer: I will be his friend." Bowing the knee, that heart cries, "Oh

God, reconcile me unto thyself by the death of thy dear Son. I throw down all my weapons; I confess my guilt; I plead for mercy. For Jesus' sake vouchsafe it to me." "But," says that soul, "if I am the friend of God, I must be the foe of Satan, and from this day I pledge myself to fight for ever with Satan till I get the victory, and am free from sin." My dear friend, I want you to stop. I do not wish you to make peace with the evil one, but I want you to consider what you are at. There are a few things I would whisper in your ear, and one is, that *sin is sweet.* The uppermost drops of sin's cup glitter and sparkle. There is pleasure in sin of a certain sort and for a certain season. It is a poisoned sweet; it is but a temporary delusion, but still the world does promise fair, its gingerbread is gilt, and though it wears nothing but tinsel, and a little gold-leaf now and then, yet it does look very much like gold. Canst thou, canst thou resist sin, when it seems so charming? The next time the cup is brought thee—thou knowest the flavour of it—oh, it is rich—canst thou turn away? Art thou certain that thou wilt be able to dash it from thy lips? Ah, man, thou wilt find it different when the trial-hour comes, to what it is now that thou art sitting in the Tabernacle and resolving, away from the temptation, that thou wilt do the right.

Remember, again, you may be *enticed by friends* who will be very pressing. You can give up sin just now, but you do not know who may be the tempter at some future time. If *she* should allure thee, who has tempted so well before! If *he—he!* should speak! He! the very word has wakened up your recollection; if he should speak as he alone can speak, and look as only he can look, can you then resist, and stand out? That witching voice, that fascinating eye! Oh how many souls have been damned for what men call love! Oh that they had but a little *true* love of themselves and others, and would not thus pander to the prince of hell. But alas, alas, while the cup itself looks sweet, there is to be added to it the hand that holds it out. It is not so easy to contend with Satan when he employs the service of some one whom you esteem highly, and love with all your heart. Remember the case of Solomon whose wisdom was marvellous, but who was enticed by his wives, and fell a prey into the hands of the evil one. It needs a spirit like the Master's, to be able to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan," to the tempter, when he has the appearance of one of your best loved friends. The devil is a crafty being, and if he cannot force the door, he will try and get the key which fits the wards of the lock, and, by the means of our tenderest love and affections, will make a way for himself into our hearts; you will find it no easy task therefore to contend with him.

Then again, remember, man, there is *habit.* You say you will all of a sudden give up your sins, and fight Satan. Do not tell me that; can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? If so, then he that is accustomed to do evil may learn to do well. If you had never sinned as you have sinned, there were not this difficulty with you; but he that has gone day after day, and year after year, into sin, is not so easily turned from it. As well hope to make Niagara leap up instead of down, as make human nature flow back to virtue instead of going downward to sin. You do not know yourself. Habit is an iron bond,

and he that is once enveloped in it may pull and strain, but he will tear away his flesh sooner than break the links of that dread chain. We have seen men who, convinced of the error of their ways, have sought to turn from them without asking the help of God. For a time they have made some little progress in appearance, but it has only been like the retreating of the waves at the rising of the tide; their evil habits have returned upon them with a rush, and have covered them deeper than before. Read the parable of our Lord concerning the unclean spirit which went out of the man, and roamed through dry places, seeking rest but finding none, and it said, "I will return to the place from whence I went out." It came back, and found it swept and garnished, and then took to it seven other evil spirits, more wicked than itself, so the last end of that man was worse than the first. Thus it is with those who enter upon the work of saving themselves, without looking up by faith to God for his needed help. Satan will triumph over you. You are like the fly in the toils of the spider's web, the more it struggles, the more it will be encompassed. You must cry for help as you are quite unable of yourself to escape from the snares of the wicked one. He has you bound fast, hand and foot, and you will never break his cords, nor be able to cast his bands from you. You have no seven locks of strength like Samson, but you will certainly be overcome.

Again, you think you will give up sin, but *ridicule* is very unpleasant, and when the finger comes to be pointed at you, and they say, "Ah, so you have set up for a saint, I see;" when they put it as they only can put it, in such a sharp, cutting, grating manner; when it is wrapped up so wittily in an epigram that is told all round the shop against you, and when, moreover, there is some foible of yours, some giddy weakness, and they know how to hook on your attempt at saintship to your weakness, and they bandy that all round, and there are fifty laughing faces for you, can you stand that? Yes, it is a very pretty thing for you to come here on Sundays, and say what you will do, but it is different to do it on Mondays. To be laughed at is not really to a sensible man anything very wonderful, for, methinks, you have only to get used to it, and then you will just as much expect to hear people laugh at you, as to hear birds singing when you walk out of a morning; but at first that is a very sharp trial, that trial of "cruel mockings;" and many who have been going to fight Satan have drawn back, for they found they could not stand it. When the Jews were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after their return from captivity, one of the most severe tests of their zeal and devotion was the laughter of their enemies who came and looked on, and said, "What do these feeble Jews? Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." The words of their foes were more cutting than swords, and keenly did they feel in their spirits the derision of the scoffers. It is as painful now for the sensitive spirit as it was of old, but you must not be daunted. Heaven is worth buying, even though it should cost a life heaped full of stinging words and malicious sayings from a deriding and taunting world. Did not Christ himself show us how to endure this trial? See his foes gathered around him when he hung dying on the cross. They laugh at him even there: "He saved others, himself

he cannot save," said they as they wagged their heads, and mocked alike his dignity and his woe. "If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross, and we will believe on thee." These sayings must have been bitterer to his spirit than the wormwood mingled with gall was to his lips. You must follow Christ here also if you would contend, as he did, with Satan. Then count the cost. Can you drink his cup, and be baptized with his baptism?

And yet further, let me say to you, you that are for going to heaven so zealously,—*gain*, gain is a very pretty thing, a very pleasant affair. Who does not like to make money? You know, if you can be religious, and grow rich at the same time, that will just suit some of you. Oh yes, the two going together, that will be admirable; you will kill the two birds with one stone. Mr. By-Ends said, "Now, if a man by being religious can get a good wife who has a considerable sum of money; and if by being religious he gets a good shop, and many customers, why," says he, "then religion is a good thing;" for to get a good wife is a good thing, and to get customers, that is another good thing, and so, he says, "The whole is a good thing put together." But he that knows Mr. By-Ends, knows that he is an old rogue, notwithstanding that he puts it prettily. I have known him. He is a member of this Church, I am sorry to say; I never went into a Church where he was not a member. I have tried to turn him out, and did once, but there was another one of the family left inside, and however many you may expel there are sure to be more of that breed remaining. But there sometimes comes a pinch with Mr. By-Ends. Now if you should find that shutting up your shop on Sundays should ruin your business, well, what then? Would you stand it? Now there are some of you that try it every now and then when you get spasmodically godly, but it does not pay you, you find; and so you begin once more to open shop on the Lord's day. Some of you Sunday traders discover, that it gets a little hot and strong for you, when you come to the Tabernacle occasionally, and you shut up for a season, but soon you say, "Well, people must live." Yes, and people must die, and people must be damned too, if they try to live by breaking God's laws. Remember that it will not pay to be religious, some people fancy. We have heard of a man saying, "I cannot afford to keep a conscience, it is too expensive an article for me." Ah, but keep in mind the saying of the Lord, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" There is such a thing as being "Penny wise, and pound foolish," and there is such a thing also as being "worldly wise, and eternally foolish." Think of this then, for the trial will come to you in the shape of yellow gold, and it will be hard to keep yourself from the glittering bait which the god of this world will lay before you.

I am putting these things to you, so that you may calculate whether you can carry on the war against the devil with all these fearful odds against you. If I were a recruiting serjeant I should not do this. He puts the shilling into the country lad's hand, and the lad may say fifty things, "Oh never mind," says the the gallant soldier, "you know, it is all glory, nothing but glory. There, I will just tie these ribbons round your hat. There are some long strips of glory to

begin with, and then all your days it will be just glory, glory for ever; and you will die a general, and be buried at Westminster Abbey, and they will play the 'Dead March in Saul,' and all that kind of thing." Now I cannot thus deceive or try to cheat men to enlist under the banner of the cross. I do not desire to raise objections to it; all I want of you is to count the cost, lest you should be like unto him who began to build without being able to finish. That is the misery of so many. I advise you, if you are about to declare war with Satan, to see whether you are able to carry it out, and win the victory.

"Well," says one, "it is hard to be saved." Nobody ever thought it was not, I hope. What does Peter say? "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" "It is hard to be saved," you say. Whoever said it was not? But it is not hard to be saved, if a man is willing to be received according to the plan which God has appointed. If Christ undertakes it, then it is done, and my counsel to those of you who are about making war with Satan, is to remember that it is too much for you, and therefore do not attempt it in your own strength. Beware of this. I know Satan will tempt you first of all to believe that you need no Saviour, then if you are not convinced of this but are disquieted because of sin, he suggests that you can save yourself. He speaks of Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus which flow close by your own door. He says, "Wash in these home streams, and be clean. Stay where you are, and help yourself;" but if you listen to the words of the seducer of souls you are lost and undone for ever. Can the man born blind see to operate upon his own scale-covered eyes so as to give himself sight? Can the crippled man run away from his lameness, and outrun the feebleness of his feet? Can the dead man exert himself to make the life-tide flow once more in his veins, and flush his cheek anew with the glow of health? Can he call back his departed spirit from the shades of the unseen world, and make it re-occupy its decaying habitation, and bid the marks of the mighty consumer begone, and leave no trace of Death's conquest behind, to remind the returning inhabitant that the palace had been occupied by the ruthless spoiler? We answer, no. A mighty finger must touch and open the eyes. An omnipotent arm must lift up the paralysed and impotent man into strength and power; and most evidently, if life is to be secured, the voice of God alone can speak the word which shall make the dead to live. On this point we wish to be clearly understood. You will never of yourself successfully resist sin so as to escape its thraldom; how much less can you remove its guilt? The cancer is in your blood, and you can never get it out. The black deed is done, and it is written, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Oh, then at once ask help of him who alone can save you from the wrath to come.

Remember, poor feeble one, nothing is too hard for God, and therefore ask Almighty strength to come unto your help. It is true you cannot contend with your besetting sins; your passions, your corruptions of whatever sort they may be, are much too strong for you; Old Adam is too mighty for you with your best intentions; but there is a strong one, whose hand, once pierced, is always ready and at the service of every sinner who would have Satan cast out. There is one "mighty to save" who can come to the rescue, and do for you what you cannot do for

yourself. Oh that you had Christ to-night, so that at once you might cry to him, "Jesus, save me; I see the fight is too unequal for me, I cannot drive out my sins, I cannot fight my way to heaven; come and help me, Lord Jesus. I put myself into thy hands; wash me in thy blood, fill me with thy Spirit; save me with thy great salvation, and let me be with thee where thou art at the last."

"No man can save himself," says one. Yet the case is very like that of the master who sent his negro servant with a letter. The negro was, like some others, rather lazy, and came back with it. "Why did you not deliver it?" "I could not." "Could not deliver it?" "No, master." "Why not?" "A deep river, sir, very deep river, I could not get across." "A deep river?" said he. "Yes." "Is not there a ferryman there?" "Do not know, sir; if there was, he was on the other side." "Did you call across, 'Boat, ahoy!'" "No, sir." "Why then, you rascal," said he, "what does it matter; it is no excuse. It is true, you could not get across the river, but then there was one there who could take you, and you never cried to him." And so it is in your case. You say, "I cannot save myself." Quite true; but there is one who can, and you have never cried to him, for, mark you, if you cry to him, if your heart says, "Oh, Saviour, come and save me," and your spirit rests in him, deep as that river of your sin certainly is, he knows how to bear you safely through it, and land you on the other shore. May he do that with each of you. With God all things are possible, though with man it is impossible. May the blessing of the Most High rest upon us this night for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Lost Silver Piece

"Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"—
Luke xv. 8—10.

THIS chapter is full of grace and truth. Its three consecutive parables have been thought to be merely a repetition of the same doctrine under different metaphors, and if that were so, the truth which it teaches is so important that it could not be rehearsed too often in our hearing. Moreover, it is one which we are apt to forget, and it is well to have it again and again impressed upon our minds. The truth here taught is just this—that mercy stretches forth her hand to misery, that grace receives men as sinners, that it deals with demerit, unworthiness, and worthlessness; that those who think themselves righteous are not the objects of divine compassion, but the unrighteous, the guilty, and the undeserving, are the proper subjects for the infinite mercy of God; in a word, that salvation is not of merit but of grace. This truth I say is most important, for it encourages penitents to return to their Father; but it is very apt to be forgotten, for even those who are saved by grace too often fall into the spirit of the elder brother, and speak as if, after all, their salvation depended on the works of the law.

But, my dear friends, the three parables recorded in this chapter are not repetitions; they all declare the same main truth, but each one reveals a different phase of it. The three parables are three sides of a vast pyramid of gospel doctrine, but there is a distinct inscription upon each. Not only in the similitude, but also in the teaching covered by the similitude, there is variety, progress, enlargement, discrimination. We have only need to read attentively to discover that in this trinity of parables, we have at once unity of essential truth and distinctness of description. Each one of the parables is needful to the other, and when combined they present us with a far more complete exposition of their doctrine than could have been conveyed by any one of them. Note for a moment the first of the three which brings before us a shepherd seeking a lost sheep. To whom

does this refer? Who is the shepherd of Israel? Who brings again that which has gone astray? Do we not clearly discern the ever glorious and blessed Chief Shepherd of the sheep, who lays down his life that he may save them? Beyond a question, we see in the first parable the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The second parable is most fitly placed where it is. It, I doubt not, represents the work of the Holy Spirit, working, through the church, for the lost but precious souls of men. The church is that woman who sweeps her house to find the lost piece of money, and in her the Spirit works his purposes of love. Now the work of the Holy Spirit follows the work of Christ. As here we first see the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, and then read of the woman seeking the lost piece of money, so the great Shepherd redeems, and then the Holy Spirit restores the soul. You will perceive that each parable is thoroughly understood in its minute details when so interpreted. The shepherd seeks a sheep which has wilfully gone astray, and so far the element of sin is present; the lost piece of money does not bring up that idea, nor was it needful that it should, since the parable does not deal with the pardon of sin as the first does. The sheep, on the other hand, though stupid is not altogether senseless and dead, but the piece of money is altogether unconscious and powerless, and therefore all the fitter emblem of man as the Holy Ghost begins to deal with him, dead in trespasses and sins. The third parable evidently represents the divine Father in his abundant love receiving the lost child who comes back to him. The third parable would be likely to be misunderstood without the first and the second. We have sometimes heard it said—here is the prodigal received as soon as he comes back, no mention being made of a Saviour who seeks and saves him. Is it possible to teach all truths in one single parable? Does not the first one speak of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep? Why need repeat what had been said before? It has also been said that the prodigal returned of his own free will, for there is no hint of the operation of a superior power upon his heart, it seems as if he himself spontaneously says, "I will arise, and go unto my Father." The answer is, that the Holy Spirit's work had been clearly described in the second parable, and needed not to be introduced again. If you put the three pictures in a line, they represent the whole compass of salvation, but each one apart sets forth the work in reference to one or other of the divine persons of the blessed Trinity. The shepherd, with much pain and self-sacrifice, seeks the reckless, wandering sheep; the woman diligently searches for the insensible but lost piece of money; the father receives the returning prodigal. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder. The three life-sketches are one, and one truth is taught in the whole three, yet each one is distinct from the other, and by itself instructive.

May we be taught of God while we try to discover the mind of the Spirit in this parable, which, as we believe, represents the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church. The church is evermore represented as a woman, either the chaste bride of Christ, or the shameless courtesan of Babylon; as for good a woman sweeps the house, so for evil a woman takes the leaven and hides it in the meal till all is leavened. Towards Christ a wife and towards men a mother, the church is most fitly set forth as a woman. A woman with a house under her

control is the full idea of the text, her husband away and herself in charge of the treasure: just such is the condition of the church since the departure of the Lord Jesus to the Father.

To bring each part of the text under inspection we shall notice man in three conditions—*lost, sought, found.*

I. First, the parable treats of man, the object of divine mercy, as LOST.

Notice, first, the treasure was *lost in the dust.* The woman had lost her piece of silver, and in order to find it she had to sweep for it, which proves that it had fallen into a dusty place, fallen to the earth, where it might be hidden and concealed amid rubbish and dirt. Every man of Adam born is as a piece of silver lost, fallen, dishonoured, and some are buried amid foulness and dust. If we should drop many pieces of money they would fall into different positions; one of them might fall into actual mire, and be lost there; another might fall upon a carpet, a cloth, or a clean, well-polished floor, and be lost there. If you have lost your money, it is equally lost into whatever place it may have fallen. So all men are alike lost, but they have not all fallen into the like condition of apparent defilement. One man from the surroundings of his childhood and the influences of education, has never indulged in the coarser and more brutalising vices; he has never been a blasphemer, perhaps never openly even a Sabbath-breaker, yet he may be lost for all that. Another, on the other hand, has fallen into great excess of riot; he is familiar with wantonness and chambering, and all manner of evil; he is lost, he is lost with an emphasis: but the more decorous sinner is lost also. There may be some here this morning (and we wish always to apply the truth as we go on), who are lost in the very worst of corruption: I would to God that they would take hope and learn from the parable before us, that the church of God and the Spirit of God are seeking after them, and they may be among the found ones yet. Since, on the other hand, there are many here who have not dropped into such unclean places, I would affectionately remind them that they are nevertheless lost, and they need as much to be sought for by the Spirit of God as if they were among the vilest of the vile. To save the moral needs divine grace as certainly as to save the immoral. If you be lost, my dear hearer, it will be small avail to you that you perished respectably, and were accursed in decent company: if you lack but one thing, yet if the deficiency be fatal, it will be but a poor consolation that you had only one lack. If one leak sent the vessel to the bottom; it was no comfort to the crew that their ship only leaked in one place. One disease may kill a man; he may be sound everywhere else, but it will be a sorry comfort to him to know that he might have lived long had but that one organ been sound. If, dear hearer, thou shouldst have no sin whatever save only an evil heart of unbelief, if all thy external life should be lovely and amiable, yet if that one fatal sin be in thee, thou canst draw small consolation from all else that is good about thee. Thou art lost by nature, and thou must be found by grace, whoever thou mayst be.

In this parable that which was lost was *altogether ignorant of its being lost.* The silver coin was not a living thing, and therefore had no consciousness of its being lost or sought after. The piece of money lost was quite as content to be on the floor or in the dust, as it was

to be in the purse of its owner amongst its like. It knew nothing about its being lost, and could not know. And it is just so with the sinner who is spiritually dead in sin, he is unconscious of his state, nor can we make him understand the danger and terror of his condition. When he feels that he is lost, there is already some work of grace in him. When the sinner knows that he is lost, he is no longer content with his condition, but begins to cry out for mercy, which is evidence that the finding work has already begun. The unconverted sinner will confess that he is lost because he knows the statement to be scriptural, and therefore out of compliment to God's word he admits it to be true; but he has no idea of what is meant by it, else would he either deny it with proud indignation, or he would bestir himself to pray that he might be restored to the place from which he has fallen, and be numbered with Christ's precious property. O my hearers, this it is that makes the Spirit of God so needful in all our preachings, and every other soul-saving exercise, because we have to deal with insensible souls. The man who puts the fire-escape against the window of a burning house, may readily enough rescue those who are aware of their danger, and who rush to the front and help him, or at least are submissive to him in his work of delivering them; but if a man were insane, if he played with the flames, if he were idiotic and thought that some grand illumination were going on, and knew nothing of the danger but was only "glamoured by the glare," then would it be hard work for the rescuer. Even thus it is with sinners. They know not, though they profess to know, that sin is hell, that to be an alien from God is to be condemned already, to live in sin is to be dead while you live. The insensibility of the piece of money fairly pictures the utter indifference of souls unquickened by divine grace.

The silver piece was *lost but not forgotten.* The woman knew that she had ten pieces of silver originally; she counted them over carefully, for they were all her little store, and she found only nine, but she well remembered that one more was hers and ought to be in her hand. This is our hope for the Lord's lost ones, they are lost but not forgotten, the heart of the Saviour remembers them, and prays for them. O soul, I trust you are one whom Jesus calls his own, if so he remembers the pangs which he endured in redeeming you, and he recollects the Father's love which was reflected on you from old eternity, when the Father gave you into the hands of his beloved Son. You are not forgotten of the Holy Spirit who seeks you for the Saviour. This is the minister's hope, that there is a people whom the Lord remembers and whom he never will forget, though they forget him. Strangers to him, far-off, ignorant, callous, careless, dead, yet the everlasting heart in heaven throbs towards them with love; and the mind of the Spirit, working on earth, is directed to them. These, who were numbered and reckoned up of old are still in the inventory of the divine memory; and though lost they are earnestly remembered still. In some sense this is true of every sinner here. You are lost, but that you are remembered is evident, for I am sent to-day to preach the gospel of Jesus to you. God has thoughts of love concerning you, and bids you turn unto him and live. Have respect, I pray you, to the word of his salvation.

Next, the piece of silver was *lost but still claimed.* Observe that the woman called the money, "*my* piece which was lost." When she lost its possession she did not lose her right to it; it did not become somebody else's when it slipped out of her hand and fell upon the floor. Those for whom Christ hath died, whom he hath peculiarly redeemed, are not Satan's even when they are dead in sin. They may come under the devil's usurped dominion, but the monster shall be chased from his throne. Christ has received them of old of the Father, and he has bought them with his precious blood, and he will have them; he will chase away the intruder and claim his own. Thus saith the Lord, "Your covenant with death is disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand." Ye have sold yourselves for nought; and ye shall be redeemed without money. Jesus shall have his own, and none shall pluck them from his hold; he will defend his claim against all comers.

Further, observe that the lost piece of money was not only remembered and claimed, but *it was also valued.* In these three parables the value of the lost article steadily rises. This is not very clear at first sight, because it may be said that a sheep is of more value than a piece of money; but notice that the shepherd only lost one sheep out of a hundred, but the woman lost one piece out of ten, and the father one son out of two. Now, it is not the value of the thing in itself which is here set forth, for the soul of a man, as absolutely valued in comparison with the infinite God, is of small esteem; but because of his love it is of great value to him. The one piece of money to the woman was a tenth part of all she had, and it was very valuable in her esteem. To the Lord of love a lost soul is very precious: it is not because of its intrinsic value, but it has a relative value which God sets at a high rate. The Holy Spirit values souls, and therefore the church prizes them too. The church sometimes says to herself, "We have but few conversions, few members; many are called, but few chosen." She counts over her few converts, her few members, and one soul is to her all the more precious because of the few there are who in these times are in the treasury of Christ, stamped with the image of the great King, and made of the precious genuine silver of God's own grace. O dear friend, you think yourself of small value, you who are conscious that you have sinned, but the church does not think you of small value, and the Holy Spirit does not despise you. He sets a high price upon you, and so do his people. We value your souls, we only wish we knew how to save them; we would spare no expense or pains if we might but be the means of finding you, and bringing you once more into the great Owner's hand.

The piece of money was lost, but *it was not lost hopelessly.* The woman had hopes of recovering it, and therefore she did not despair, but set to work at once. It is a dreadful thing to think of those souls which are lost hopelessly. Their state reminds me of a paragraph I have cut from this week's newspaper:—"The fishing smack Veto, of Grimsby, S. Cousins, master, arrived in port from the Dogger Bank on Saturday night. The master reports that on the previous Wednesday, when about two hundred miles from Spurn, he sighted to the leeward what at first appeared to be a small schooner in distress, but on bearing down to her found her to be a full-sized lifeboat, upwards of

twenty feet long, and full of water up to her corks. There was no name on the boat, which had evidently belonged to some large ship or steamer. It was painted white both inside and out, with a brown streak round the rim. When alongside, on closer examination, three dead sailors were perceived lying aft, huddled together, and a fourth athwart in the bow, with his head hanging over the rowlocks. They seemed from their dress and general appearance to be foreigners, but the bodies had been frightfully 'washed about,' and were in a state of decomposition, and had evidently been dead some weeks. The water-logged waif drifted on with its ghastly cargo, and the horrible sight so shocked the crew of the Veto that afterwards they were almost too unnerved to attend to their trawling, and the smack, in consequence, returned to port with a comparatively small catch, and sooner than expected." Do you wonder at the men sickening in the presence of this mystery of the sea? I shudder as I think I see that Charon-like boat floating on and on; mercy need not follow it, she can confer no boon; love need not seek it, no deed of hers can save. My soul sees, as in a vision, souls hopelessly lost, drifting on the waves of eternity, beyond all hope or help. Alas! Alas! Millions of our race are now in that condition. Upon them has passed the second death, and powerless are we all to save them. Towards them even the gospel has no aspect of hope. Our joy is that we have to deal to-day with lost souls who are not yet hopelessly lost. They are dead in sin, but there is a quickening power which can make them live. O mariner of the sea of life, fisher of men upon this stormy sea, those castaways whom you meet with are accessible to your efforts of compassion, they can be rescued from the pitiless deeps; your mission is not a hopeless one. I rejoice over the ungodly man here to-day that he is not in torment, not in hell, he is not among those whose worm dieth not and whose fire is not quenched. I congratulate the Christian church too, that her piece of money has not fallen where she cannot find it. I rejoice that the fallen around us are not past hope; yea, though they dwell in the worst dens of London, though they be thieves and harlots, they are not beyond the reach of mercy. Up, O church of God, while possibilities of mercy remain! Gird up your loins, ye soul-winners, and resolve by the grace of God that every hour of hope shall be well employed by you.

One other point is worthy of notice. The piece of silver was lost, but it was *lost in the house*, and the woman knew it to be so. If she had lost it in the streets, the probabilities are she would not have looked for it again, for other hands might have closed over it. If she had lost it in a river, or dropped it in the sea, she might very fairly have concluded that it was gone for ever, but evidently she was sure that she had lost it in the house. Is it not a consolation to know that those here, who are lost, are still in the house? They are still under the means of grace, within the sphere of the church's operations, within the habitation of which she is the mistress, and where the Holy Spirit works. What thankfulness there ought to be in your minds that you are not lost as heathens, nor lost amid Romish or Mohammedan superstition, but lost where the gospel is faithfully and plainly preached to you; where you are lovingly told, that whosoever believeth in Christ

Jesus is not condemned. Lost, but lost where the church's business is to look after you, where it is the Spirit's work to seek and to find you.

This is the condition of the lost soul, depicted as a lost piece of silver

II. Secondly, we shall notice the soul under another condition, we shall view it as SOUGHT.

By whom was the piece of silver sought? It was *sought by its owner personally.* Notice, she who lost the money lit a candle and swept the house, and sought diligently till *she* found it. So, brethren, I have said that the woman represents the Holy Spirit, or rather the church in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Now, there will never be a soul found till the Holy Spirit seeks after it. He is the great soul finder. The heart will continue in the dark until he comes with his illuminating power. He is the owner, he possesses it, and he alone can effectually seek after it. The God to whom the soul belongs must seek the soul. But he does it by his church, for souls belong to the church too; they are sons and daughters of the chosen mother, they are her citizens and treasures. For this reason the church must personally seek after souls. She cannot delegate her work to anybody. The woman did not pay a servant to sweep the house, but she swept it herself. Her eyes were much better than a servant's eyes, for the servant's eyes would only look after somebody else's money, and perhaps would not see it; but the mistress would look after her own money, and she would be certain to light upon it if it were anywhere within sight. When the church of God solemnly feels, "It is our work to look after sinners, we must not delegate it even to the minister, or to the City-missionary, or the Bible-woman, but the church as a church must look after the souls of sinners," then I believe souls will be found and saved. When the church recognises that these lost souls belong to her, she will be likely to find them. It will be a happy day when every church of God is actively at work for the salvation of sinners. It has been the curse of Christendom that she has ventured to delegate her sacred duties to men called priests, or that she has set apart certain persons to be called *the religious*, who are to do works of mercy and charity and of evangelisation. We are, every one of us who are Christ's, bound to do our own share; nay, we should deem it a privilege of which we will not be deprived, personally to serve God, personally to sweep the house and search after the lost spiritual treasures. The church herself, in the power of the indwelling Spirit of God, must seek lost souls.

Note that this seeking became *a matter of chief concern* with the woman. I do not know what other business she had to do, but I do know that she put it all by to find the piece of money. There was the corn to be ground for the morning meal, perhaps that was done, at any rate, if not so, she left it unprepared. There was a garment to be mended, or water to be drawn, or the fire to be kindled, or the friends and neighbours to be conversed with—never mind, the mistress forgets everything else, she has lost her piece of money, and she must find it at once. So with the church of God, her chief concern should be to seek the perishing sons of men. To bring souls to know Jesus, and to be saved in him with a great salvation should be the church's great longing and concern. She has other things to do. She has her own edification to consider, she has other matters to be attended to in their

place, but this first, this evermore and always first. The woman evidently said, "The money is lost, I must find that first." The loss of her piece of silver was so serious a matter that if she sat down to her mending, her hands would miss their nimbleness, or if any other household work demanded her attention, it would be an irksome task to her, for she was thinking of that piece of coin. If her friend came and talked with her, she would say to herself, "I wish she were gone, for I want to be looking after my lost money." I wish the church of God had such an engrossing love for poor sinners that she would feel everything to be an impertinence which hindered her from soul-saving. We have every now and then, as a church, a little to do with politics, and a little to do with finance, for we are still in the world, but I love to see in all churches everything kept in the background, compared with soul-saving work. This must be first and foremost. Educate the people—yes, certainly; we take an interest in everything which will do good to our fellow citizens, for we are men as well as Christians; but first and foremost our business is to win souls, to bring men to Jesus, to hunt up those who bear heaven's image, though lost and fallen. This is what we must be devoted to, this is the main and chief concern of believers, the very reason for the existence of a church; if she regard it not, she forgets her highest end.

Now note, that the woman having thus set her heart to find her money, *she used the most fit and proper means* to accomplish her end. First, she lit a candle. So doth the Holy Spirit in the church. In Eastern dwellings it would be necessary, if you lost a piece of money and wanted to find it, to light a candle at any time; for in our Saviour's day glass was not used, and the windows of houses were only little slits in the side of the wall, and the rooms were very dark. Almost all the Oriental houses are very dark to this day, and if anything be dropped as small as a piece of silver, it must be looked for with a candle even at high noon. Now, the sphere in which the church moves here on earth is a dim twilight of mental ignorance, and moral darkness, and in order to find a lost soul, light must be brought to bear upon it. The Holy Spirit uses the light of the gospel; he convinces men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. The woman lit a candle, and even thus the Holy Spirit lights up some chosen man whom he makes to be a light in the world. He calls to himself whomsoever he wills, and makes him a lamp to shine upon the people. Such a man will have to be consumed in his calling, like a candle he will be burnt up in light-giving. Earnest zeal, and laborious self-sacrifice, will eat him up. So may this church, and every church of God, be continually using up her anointed men and women, who shall be as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, to find out lost souls.

But she was not content with her candle, she fetched her broom, she swept the house. If she could not find the silver as things were in the house, she brought the broom to bear upon the accumulated dust. Oh, how a Christian church, when it is moved by the Holy Spirit, cleanses herself and purges all her work! "Perhaps," saith she, "some of our members are inconsistent, and so men are hardened in sin; these offenders must be put away. The tone of religion is low—that may be hindering the conversion of souls, it must be

raised. Perhaps our statements of truth, and our ways of proclaiming it, are not the most likely to command attention, we must amend them; we must use the best possible methods, we must in fact sweep the whole house." I delight to see an earnest house-sweeping by confession of sin at a prayer meeting, or by a searching discourse, a house-sweeping when every one is earnest to reform himself, and to get nearer to God himself by a revival of his own personal piety. This is one of the means by which the church is enabled to find the hidden ones. Besides this, all the neighbourhood round the church (for the house is the sphere in which the church moves), must be ransacked, stirred, turned over, in a word "swept." A church that is really in earnest after souls will endeavour to penetrate the gloom of poverty and stir the heaps of profligacy. She will hunt high and hunt low if by any means she may rescue from destruction the precious thing upon which her heart is set.

Carefully note that this seeking after the lost piece of silver with fitting instruments, the broom and the candle, was *attended with no small stir*. She swept the house—there was dust for her eyes; if any neighbours were in the house there was dust for them. You cannot sweep a house without causing some confusion and temporary discomfort. We sometimes hear persons complain of certain Christians for making too much ado about religion. The complaint shows that something is being done, and in all probability some success being achieved. Those people who have no interest in the lost silver are annoyed at the dust; it is getting down their throats, and they cough at it; never mind, good woman, sweep again, and make them grumble more. Another will say, "I do not approve of religious excitement, I am for quiet and orderly modes of procedure." I dare say that this good woman's neighbour, when she came in to make a call, exclaimed in disgust, "Why, mistress, there is not a chair to sit down upon in comfort, and you are so taken up about this lost money that you scarce give me an answer. Why, you are wasting candle at a great rate, and seem quite in a fever." "Well," the good woman would answer, "but I must find my piece of silver, and in order to seek it out I can bear a little dust myself, and so must you if you wish to stop here while I am searching." An earnest church will be sure to experience a degree of excitement when it is soul-hunting, and very cautious, very fastidious, very critical people will find fault. Never mind them, my brethren, sweep on and let them talk on. Never mind making a dust if you find the money. If souls be saved irregularities and singularities are as the small dust of the balance. If men be brought to Jesus, care nothing what cavillers say. Sweep on, sweep on, even though men exclaim, "They that turn the world upside down are come hither also." Though confusion and stir, and even persecution be the present result, yet if the finding of an immortal soul be the ultimate effect, you will be well repaid for it.

It is to be remarked, also, that in the seeking of this piece of silver the coin was *sought in a most engrossing manner*. For a time nothing was thought of but the lost silver. Here is a candle: the good woman does not read by the light of it, nor mend her garments; no, but the candle-light is all spent on that piece of money. All its light is consecrated to the search. Here is a broom: there is other work for the broom to do, but for the present it sweeps for the silver and for

nothing else. Here are two bright eyes in the good woman's head: ay, but they look for nothing but the lost money; she does not care what else may be in the house or out of it—her money she cares for, and that she must find; and here she is with candle, broom, strength, eyesight, faculties of mind, and limbs of body, all employed in searching for the lost treasure. It is just so when the Holy Ghost works in a church, the preacher, like a candle, yields his light, but it is all with the view of finding out the sinner and letting him see his lost estate. Whether it be the broom of the law or the light of the gospel, all is meant for the sinner. All the Holy Spirit's wisdom is engaged to find the sinner, and all the living church's talent and substance and power are put forth if by any means the sinner may be saved. It is a fair picture, may I see it daily. How earnestly souls are sought for when the Spirit of God is truly in his church!

One other thought only. This woman *sought for her piece of silver continuously*—"till she found it." May you and I, as parts of the church of God, look after wandering souls till we find them. We say they discourage us. No doubt that piece of silver did discourage the woman who sought it. We complain that men do not appear inclined to religion. Did the piece of money lend the housewife any help? Was it any assistance to her? She did the seeking, she did it all. And the Holy Ghost through you, my brother, seeks the salvation of the sinner, not expecting the sinner to help him, for the sinner is averse to being found. What, were you repulsed the other day by one whose spiritual good you longed for? Go again! Where your invitations laughed at? Invite again! Did you become the subject of ridicule through your earnest entreaties? Entreat again! Those are not always the least likely to be saved who at first repel our efforts. A harsh reception is sometimes only an intimation that the heart recognises the power of the truth, though it does not desire at present to yield to it. Persevere, brother, till you find the soul you seek. You who spend so much effort in your Sunday-school class, use still your candle, enlighten the child's mind still, sweep the house till you find what you seek; never give up the child till it is brought to Christ. You, in your senior class, dealing with that young man or young woman, cease not from your private prayers and from your personal admonitions, till that heart belongs to Jesus. You who can preach in the streets, or visit the lodging-houses, or go from door to door with tracts, I charge you all, for you can all do something, never give up the pursuit of sinners until they are safely lodged in Jesus' hands. We must have them saved! With all the intense perseverance of the woman who turned everything upside down, and counted all things but loss that she might but find her treasure, so may we also, the Spirit of God working in us, upset everything of rule and conventionality, and form and difficulty, if we may but by any means save some, and bring out of the dust those who bear the King's image, and are dear to the King's heart.

III. Time has fled, alas! too swiftly, and so I must close with the third point, which is the piece of silver FOUND.

Found! In the first place, this was *the woman's ultimatum, and nothing short of it.* She never stopped until the coin was found. So it is the Holy Spirit's design, not that the sinner should be brought

into a hopeful state, but that he should be actually saved : and this is the church's great concern, not that people be made hearers, not that they be made orthodox professors, but that they be really changed and renewed, regenerated and born again.

The woman herself found the piece of money. It did not turn up by accident, nor did some neighbour step in and find it. The Spirit of God himself finds sinners, and the church of God herself as a rule is the instrument of their recovery. Dear brethren, a few years ago there was a kind of slur cast upon the visible church, by many enthusiastic but mistaken persons, who dreamed that the time was come for doing away with organised effort, for irregular agencies outside of the visible church were to do all the work. Certain remarkable men sprang up whose ferocious censures almost amounted to attacks upon the recognised churches. Their efforts were apart from the regular ministry, and in some cases ostentatiously in opposition to it. It was as much their aim to pull down the existing church as to bring in converts. I ask any man who has fairly watched these efforts, what they have come to? I never condemned them, nor will I; but I do venture to say to-day in the light of their history, that they have not superseded regular church work and never will. The masses were to be aroused, but where are the boasted results? What has become of many of these much-vaunted works? Those who have worked in connection with a church of God have achieved permanent usefulness ; those who acted as separatist agencies, though they blazed for awhile before the public eye and filled the corners of the newspapers with spiritual puffery, are now either altogether or almost extinct. Where are the victories which were to be won by these free-shooters ? Echo answers, Where ? We have to fall back on the old disciplined troops. God means to bless the church still, and it is through the church that he will continue to send a benediction upon the sons of men. I am glad to hear of anybody preaching the gospel; if Christ is preached I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. I remember the Master's words, " Forbid them not ! He that is not against us is for us." Still the mass of conversions will come through the church, and by her regular organised efforts. The woman who lights the candle and sweeps the house, to whom the silver belongs, will herself find it.

Now notice when she had found it what she did, *she rejoiced.* The greater her trouble in searching, the higher her joy in finding. What joy there is in the church of God when sinners are converted ! We have our high holidays, we have our mirthful days downstairs in the lecture hall, when we hear of souls turned from the paths of the destroyer ; and in the vestries behind, your pastors and elders often experience such joy as only heaven can equal, when we have heard the stories of souls emancipated from the slavery of sin, and led into the perfect liberty which Jesus gives. The church rejoices.

Next, she *calls her friends and neighbours* to share her joy. I am afraid we do not treat our friends and neighbours with quite enough respect, or remember to invite them to our joys. Who are they ? I think the angels are here meant; not only the angels in heaven, but those who are watching here below. Note well, that when the shepherd took home the sheep, it is written, " There *shall be* joy *in heaven* over one

sinner that repenteth ;" but it does not mention heaven here, nor speak of the future, but it is written, "*There is* joy in the presence of the angels of God." Now, the church is on earth, and the Holy Spirit is on earth, at work ; when there is a soul saved, the angels down below, who keep watch and ward around the faithful, and so are our friends and neighbours, rejoice with us. Know ye not that angels are present in our assemblies? for this reason the apostle tells us that the woman hath her head covered in the assembly. He saith, "Because of the angels, for they love order and decorum." The angels are wherever the saints are, beholding our orders and rejoicing in our joy. When we see conversions we may bid them rejoice too, and they will praise God with us. I do not suppose the rejoicing ends there; for as angels are always ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, they soon convey the tidings to the hosts above, and heaven rejoices over one repenting sinner.

The joy is a present joy; it is a joy in the house, in the church in her own sphere ; it is the joy of her neighbours who are round about her here below. All other joy seems swallowed up in this: as every other occupation was suspended to find the lost silver, so every other joy is hushed when the precious thing is found. The church of God has a thousand joys—the joy of her saints ascending to the skies, the joy of her saints ripening for glory, the joy of such as contend with sin and overcome it, and grow in grace and receive the promise; but the chief joy in the church, which swallows all others, as Aaron's rod swallowed up the other rods, is the joy over the lost soul which, after much sweeping and searching, is found at last.

The practical lesson to the unconverted is just this. Dear friend, *see what value is set upon you.* You think that nobody cares for you—why, heaven and earth care for you! You say, "I am as nothing, a castaway, and I am utterly worthless." No, you are not worthless to the blessed Spirit, nor worthless to the church of God—she longs for you.

See, again, *how false that suspicion of yours is that you will not be welcome* if you come to Christ. Welcome! welcome! why, the church is searching for you; the Spirit of God is searching for you. Do not talk of welcome, you will be a great deal more than welcome. Oh, how glad will Christ be, and the Spirit be, and the church be, to receive you! Ah! but you complain that you have done nothing to make you fit for mercy. Talk not so, what had the lost piece of money done? What could it do? It was lost and helpless. They who sought it did all; he who seeks you will do all for you. O poor soul, since Christ now bids thee come, come! If his Spirit draws thee, yield! Since the promise now speaks, "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," accept the promise. Believe in Jesus. God bless you and save you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Number One Thousand

or

"Bread Enough and to Spare"

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"—Luke xv. 17.

"He came to himself." The word may be applied to one waking out of a deep swoon. He had been unconscious of his true condition, and he had lost all power to deliver himself from it; but now he was coming round again, returning to consciousness and action. The voice which shall awaken the dead aroused him; the visions of his sinful trance all disappeared; his foul but fascinating dreams were gone; he came to himself. Or the word may be applied to one recovering from insanity. The prodigal son had played the madman, for sin is madness of the worst kind. He had been demented, he had put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, darkness for light and light for darkness; he had injured himself, and had done for his soul what those possessed of devils in our Saviour's time did for their bodies, when they wounded themselves with stones, and cut themselves with knives. The insane man does not know himself to be insane, but as soon as he comes to himself he painfully perceives the state from which he is escaping. Returning then to true reason and sound judgment, the prodigal came to himself. Another illustration of the word may be found in the old world fables of enchantment: when a man was disenthralled from the magician's spell he "came to himself." Classic story has its legend of Circe, the enchantress, who transformed men into swine. Surely this young man in our parable had been degraded in the same manner. He had lowered his manhood to the level of the brutes. It should be the property of man to have love to his kindred, to have respect for right, to have some care for his own interest; this young man had lost all these proper attributes of humanity, and so had become as the beast that perisheth. But as the poet sings of Ulysses, that he compelled the enchantress to restore his companions to their original form, so here we see the prodigal returning to manhood, looking away from his sensual pleasures, and commencing a course of conduct more consistent with his birth and parentage. There are men

here to-day perhaps who are still in this swoon; O God of heaven, arouse them! Some here who are morally insane; the Lord recover them, the divine Physician put his cooling hand upon their fevered brow, and say to them: "I will; be thou made whole." Perhaps there are others here who have allowed their animal nature to reign supreme; may he who destroys the works of the devil deliver them from the power of Satan, and give them power to become the sons of God. He shall have all the glory!

It appears that when the prodigal came to himself he was shut up to two thoughts. Two facts were clear to him, that there was plenty in his father's house, and that he himself was famishing. May the two kindred spiritual facts have absolute power over all your hearts, if you are yet unsaved; for they were most certainly all-important and pressing truths. These are no fancies of one in a dream; no ravings of a maniac; no imaginations of one under fascination: it is most true that there is plenty of all good things in the Father's house, and that the sinner needs them. No where else can grace be found or pardon gained; but with God there is plenitude of mercy; let none venture to dispute this glorious truth. Equally true is it that the sinner without God is perishing. He is perishing now; he will perish everlastingly. All that is worth having in his existence will be utterly destroyed, and he himself shall only remain as a desolation; the owl and the bittern of misery and anguish shall haunt the ruins of his nature for ever and for ever. If we could shut up unconverted men to those two thoughts, what hopeful congregations we should have. Alas! they forget that there is mercy only with God, and fancy that it is to be found somewhere else; and they try to slip away from the humbling fact of their own lost estate, and imagine that perhaps there may be some back door of escape; that, after all, they are not so bad as the Scripture declares, or that perchance it shall be right with them at the last, however wrong it may be with them now. Alas! my brethren, what shall we do with those who wilfully shut their eyes to truths of which the evidence is overwhelming, and the importance overpowering? I earnestly entreat those of you who know how to approach the throne of God in faith, to breathe the prayer that he would now bring into captivity the unconverted heart, and put these two strong fetters upon every unregenerate soul; there is abundant grace with God, there is utter destitution with themselves. Bound with such fetters, and led into the presence of Jesus, the captive would soon receive the liberty of the children of God.

I intend only to dwell this morning, or mainly, upon the first thought, the master thought, as it seems to me, which was in the prodigal's mind—that which really constrained him to say, "I will arise and go to my father." It was not, I think, the home-bringing thought that he was perishing with hunger, but the impulse towards his father found its mainspring in the consideration, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare!" The plenty, the abundance, the superabundance of the father's house, was that which attracted him to return home; and many, many a soul has been led to seek God when it has fully believed that there was abundant mercy with him. My desire this morning shall be to put plainly before every sinner here the exceeding abundance of the grace of God

in Christ Jesus, hoping that the Lord will find out those who are his sons, and that they may catch at these words, and as they hear of the abundance of the bread in the Father's house, may say, "I will arise and go to my Father."

I. First, then, let us consider for a short time THE MORE THAN ABUNDANCE OF ALL GOOD THINGS IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE. What dost thou need this morning, awakened sinner? Of all that thou needest, there is with God an all-sufficient, a superabounding supply; "bread enough and to spare." Let us prove this to thee. First, *consider the Father himself*, and whosoever shall rightly consider the Father, will at once perceive that there can be no stint to mercy, no bound to the possibilities of grace. What is the nature and character of the Supreme? "Is he harsh or loving?" saith one. The Scripture answers the question, not by telling us that God is loving, but by assuring us that God is love. God himself is love; it is his very essence. It is not that love is in God, but that God himself is love. Can there be a more concise and more positive way of saying that the love of God is infinite? You cannot measure God himself; your conceptions cannot grasp the grandeur of his attributes, neither can you tell the dimensions of his love, nor conceive the fulness of it. Only this know, that high as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways, and his thoughts than your thoughts. His mercy endureth for ever. He pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage. He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive: and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." "Thy mercy is great above the heavens." "The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

If divine love alone should not seem sufficient for your salvation, remember that with the Father to whom the sinner returns, there is as much of wisdom as there is of grace. Is thy case a very difficult one? He that made thee can heal thee. Are thy diseases strange and complex? He that fashioned the ear, can he not remove its deafness? He that made the eye, can he not enlighten it if it be blind? No mischief can have happened to thee, but what he who is thy God can recover thee from it. Matchless wisdom cannot fail to meet the intricacies of thy case.

Neither can there be any failure of power with the Father. Dost thou not know that he who made the earth, and stretched out the heavens like a tent to dwell in, hath no bound to his strength, nor limit to his might? If thou needest omnipotence to lift thee up from the slough into which thou hast fallen, omnipotence is ready to deliver thee, if thou cry to the strong for strength. Though thou shouldest need all the force with which the Creator made the worlds, and all the strength with which he bears up the pillars of the universe, all that strength and force should be laid out for thy good, if thou wouldst believingly seek mercy at the hand of God in Christ Jesus. None of his power shall be against thee, none of his wisdom shall plan thy overthrow; but love shall reign in all, and every attribute of God shall become subservient to thy salvation. Oh, when I think of sin I cannot understand how a sinner can be saved; but when I think of God, and look into his heart, I understand how readily he can forgive. "Look into

his heart," saith one; "how can we do that?" Hath he not laid bare his heart to you? Do you enquire where he has done this? I answer, yonder, upon Calvary's cross. What was in the very centre of the divine heart? What, but the person of the Well-beloved, his only begotten Son? And he hath taken his only begotten and nailed him to the cross, because, if I may venture so to speak, he loved sinners better than his Son. He spared not his Son, but he spares the sinner; he poured out his wrath upon his Son and made him the substitute for sinners, that he might lavish love upon the guilty who deserved his anger. O soul, if thou art lost, it is not from any want of grace, or wisdom, or power in the Father; if thou perish, it is not because God is hard to move or unable to save. If thou be a castaway, it is not because the Eternal refused to hear thy cries for pardon or rejected thy faith in him. On thine own head be thy blood, if thy soul be lost. If thou starve, thou starvest because thou wilt starve; for in the Father's house there is "bread enough and to spare."

But, now, consider a second matter which may set this more clearly before us. Think of *the Son of God*, who is indeed the true bread of life for sinners. Sinner, I return to my personal address. Thou needest a Saviour; and thou mayst well be encouraged when thou seest that a Saviour is provided—provided by God, since it is certain he would not make a mistake in the provision. But consider who the Saviour is. He is himself God. Jesus who came from heaven for our redemption was not an angel, else might we tremble to trust the weight of our sin upon him. He was not mere man, or he could but have suffered as a substitute for one, if indeed for one; but he was very God of very God, in the beginning with the Father. And does such a one come to redeem? Is there room to doubt as to his ability, if that be the fact? I do confess this day, that if my sins were ten thousand times heavier than they are, yea, and if I had all the sins of this crowd in addition piled upon me, I could trust Jesus with them all at this moment now that I know him to be the Christ of God. He is the mighty God, and by his pierced hand the burden of our sins is easily removed; he blotteth out our sins, he casts them into the depths of the sea.

But think of what Jesus the Son of God has done. He who was God, and thus blessed for ever, left the throne and royalties of heaven, and stooped to yonder manger. There he lies; his mother wraps him in swaddling clothes, he hangs upon her breast; the Infinite is clothed as an infant, the Invisible is made manifest in flesh, the Almighty is linked with weakness, for our sakes. Oh, matchless stoop of condescension! If the Redeemer God does this in order to save us, shall it be thought a thing impossible for him to save the vilest of the vile? Can anything be too hard for him who comes from heaven to earth to redeem?

Pause not because of astonishment, but press onward. Do you see him who was God over all, blessed for ever, living more than thirty years in the midst of the sons of men, bearing the infirmities of manhood, taking upon himself our sicknesses, and sharing our sorrows: his feet weary with treading the acres of Palestine; his body faint oftentimes with hunger and thirst, and labour; his knees knit to the earth with midnight prayer; his eyes red with weeping (for ofttimes Jesus wept),

tempted in all points like as we are? Matchless spectacle! An incarnate God dwells among sinners, and endures their contradiction! What glory flashed forth ever and anon from the midst of his lowliness! a glory which should render faith in him inevitable. Thou who didst walk the sea: thou who didst raise the dead, it is not rational to doubt thy power to forgive sins! Didst thou not thyself put it so when thou badest the man take up his bed and walk? "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?" Assuredly he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him: he was able even here on earth in weakness to forgive sins, much more now that he is seated in his glory. He is exalted on high to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins.

But, ah! the master proof that in Christ Jesus there is "bread enough and to spare," is the cross. Will you follow me a moment, will you follow him, rather, to Gethsemane? Can you see the bloody sweat as it falls upon the ground in his agony? Can you think of his scourging before Herod and Pilate? Can you trace him along the *Via Dolorosa* of Jerusalem? Will your tender hearts endure to see him nailed to the tree, and lifted up to bleed and die? This is but the shell; as for the inward kernel of his sufferings no language can describe it, neither can conception peer into it. The everlasting God laid sin on Christ, and where the sin was laid there fell the wrath. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." Now he that died upon the cross was God's only begotten Son. Can you conceive a limit to the merit of such a Saviour's death? I know there are some who think it necessary to their system of theology to limit the merit of the blood of Jesus: if my system of theology needed such a limitation, I would cast it to the winds. I cannot, dare not, allow the thought to find a lodging in my mind; it seems so near akin to blasphemy. In Christ's finished work I see an ocean of merit; my plummet finds no bottom, my eye discovers no shore. There must be sufficient efficacy in the blood of Christ, if God had so willed it, to have saved not only all this world, but ten thousand worlds, had they transgressed the Maker's law. Once admit infinity into the matter, and limit is out of the question. Having a divine person for an offering, it is not consistent to conceive of limited value; bound and measure are terms inapplicable to the divine sacrifice. The intent of the divine purpose fixes the application of the infinite offering, but does not change it into a finite work. In the atonement of Christ Jesus there is "bread enough and to spare;" even as Paul wrote to Timothy, "He is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

But now let me lead you to another point of solemnly joyful consideration, and that is *the Holy Spirit.* To believe and love the Trinity is to possess the key of theology. We spoke of the Father, we spoke of the Son; let us now speak of the Holy Spirit. We do him all too little honour, for the Holy Spirit condescends to come to earth and dwell in our hearts; and notwithstanding all our provocations he still abides within his people. Now, sinner, thou needest a new life and thou needest holiness, for both of these are necessary to make thee fit for heaven. Is there a provision for this? The Holy Spirit is provided and given in the covenant of grace; and

surely in him there is "enough and to spare." What cannot the Holy Spirit do? Being divine, nothing can be beyond his power. Look at what he has already done. He moved upon the face of chaos, and brought it into order; all the beauty of creation arose beneath his moulding breath. We ourselves must confess with Elihu, "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life." Think of the great deeds of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when men unlearned spake with tongues of which they knew not a syllable aforetime, and the flames of fire upon them were also within them, so that their hearts burned with zeal and courage to which they hitherto had been strangers. Think of the Holy Spirit's work on such a one as Saul of Tarsus. That persecutor foams blood, he is a very wolf, he would devour the saints of God at Damascus, and yet, within a few moments, you hear him say, "Who art thou, Lord?" and yet again, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His heart is changed; the Spirit of God has new created it; the adamant is melted in a moment into wax. Many of us stand before you as the living monuments of what the Holy Ghost can do, and we can assure you from our own experience, that there is no inward evil which he cannot overcome, no lustful desire of the flesh which he cannot subdue, no obduracy of the affections which he cannot melt. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Surely no sinner can be beyond the possibilities of mercy when the Holy Spirit condescends to be the agent of human conversion. O sinner, if thou perish, it is not because the Holy Spirit wants power, or the blood of Jesus lacks efficacy, or the Father fails in love; it is because thou believest not in Christ, but dost abide in wilful rebellion, refusing the abundant bread of life which is placed before thee.

A few rapid sentences upon other things, which will go to show still further the greatness of the provision of divine mercy. Observe well that *throughout all the ages God has been sending one prophet after another*, and these prophets have been succeeded by apostles, and these by martyrs and confessors, and pastors and evangelists, and teachers; all these have been commissioned by the Lord in regular succession; and what has been the message they have had to deliver? They have all pointed to Christ, the great deliverer. Moses and the prophets all spoke of him, and so have all truly God-sent ambassadors. Dost thou think, sinner, that God has made all this fuss about a trifle? Has he sent all these servants to call thee to a table insufficiently furnished? Has he multiplied his invitations through so long a time to bid thee and others come to a provision which is not, after all, sufficient for them? Oh, it cannot be! God is not mocked, neither does he mock poor needy souls. The stores of his mercy are sufficient for the utmost emergencies.

"Rivers of love and mercy here
In a rich ocean join;
Salvation in abundance flows,
Like floods of milk and wine.

Great God, the treasures of thy love
Are everlasting mines,
Deep as our helpless miseries are,
And boundless as our sins."

Recollect, again, that *God has been pleased to stake his honour upon the gospel.* Men desire a name, and God also is jealous of his glory. Now, what has God been pleased to select for his name? Is it not the conversion and salvation of men? When instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree, and instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. And dost thou think God will get a name by saving little sinners by a little Saviour? Ah! his great name comes from washing out stains as black as hell, and pardoning sinners who were foulest of the foul. Is there one monstrous rebel here who is qualified to glorify God greatly, because his salvation will be the wonder of angels and the amazement of devils? I hope there is. O thou most degraded, black, loathsome sinner, nearest to being a damned sinner, if this voice can reach thee, I challenge thee to come and prove whether God's mercy is not a match for thy sin. Thou Goliath sinner, come thou hither; thou shalt find that God can slay thine enmity, and make thee yet his friend, and the more his loving and adoring servant, because great forgiveness shall secure great love. Such is the greatness of divine mercy, that "where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound."

Dost thou think, again, O sinner, that Jesus Christ came out of heaven to do a little deed, and to provide a slender store of mercy? Dost thou think he went up to Calvary, and down to the grave, and all, that he might do a commonplace thing, and provide a stinted, narrow, limited salvation, such as thine unbelief would imagine his redemption to be? No. We speak of the labours of Hercules, but these were child's play compared with the labours of Christ who slew the lion of hell, turned a purifying stream through the Augean stables of man's sin, and cleansed them, and performed ten thousand miracles besides: and will you so depreciate Christ as to imagine that what he has accomplished is, after all, little, so little that it is not enough to save you? If it were in my power to single out the man who has been the most dishonest, most licentious, most drunken, most profane—in three words, most earthly, sensual, devilish—I would repeat the challenge which I gave just now, and bid him draw near to Jesus, and see whether the fountain filled with Christ's atoning blood cannot wash him white. I challenge him at this instant to come and cast himself at the dear Redeemer's feet, and see if he will say, "I cannot save thee, thou hast sinned beyond my power." It shall never, never, never be, for he is able to the uttermost to save. He is a Saviour, and a great one. Christ will be honoured by the grandeur of the grace which he bestows upon the greatest of offenders. There is in him pardon "enough and to spare."

I must leave this point, but I cannot do so without adding that I think "BREAD ENOUGH AND TO SPARE" might be taken for the motto of the gospel. I believe in particular redemption, and that Christ laid down his life for his sheep; but, as I have already said, I do not believe in the limited value of that redemption; how else could I dare to read the words of John, "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." There is a sure portion for his own elect, but there is also over and above "to spare." I believe in the electing love which will save all its objects—"bread enough;" but I believe in boundless benevolence, "Bread enough *and to spare.*" We,

when we have a purpose to accomplish, put forth the requisite quantity of strength and no more, for we must be economical, we must not waste our limited store; even charity gives the poor man no more than he absolutely needs; but when God feeds the multitude, he spreads the board with imperial bounty. Our water-cart runs up and down the favoured road, but when heaven's clouds would favour the good man's fields, they deluge whole nations, and even pour themselves upon the sea. There is no real waste with God; but at the same time there is no stint. "BREAD ENOUGH AND TO SPARE;" write that inscription over the house of mercy, and let every hungry passer-by be encouraged thereby to enter in and eat.

II. We must now pass on to a second consideration, and dwell very briefly on it. According to the text, there was not only bread enough in the house, but THE LOWEST IN THE FATHER'S HOUSE ENJOYED ENOUGH AND TO SPARE.

We can never make a parable run on all fours, therefore we cannot find the exact counterpart of the "hired servants." I understand the prodigal to have meant this, that the very lowest menial servant employed by his father had bread to eat, and had "bread enough and to spare." Now, how should we translate this? Why, sinner, the very lowest creature that God has made, that has not sinned against him, is well supplied and has abounding happiness. There are adaptations for pleasure in the organisations of the lowest animals. See how the gnats dance in the summer's sunbeam; hear the swallows as they scream with delight when on the wing. He who cares for birds and insects will surely care for men. God who hears the ravens when they cry, will he not hear the returning penitent? He gives these insects happiness; did he mean me to be wretched? Surely he who opens his hand and supplies the lack of every living thing, will not refuse to open his hand and supply my needs if I seek his face.

Yet I must not make these lowest creatures to be the hired servants. Whom shall I then select among men? I will put it thus. The very worst of sinners that have come to Christ have found grace "enough and to spare," and the very least of saints who dwell in the house of the Lord find love "enough and to spare." Take then *the most guilty of sinners*, and see how bountifully the Lord treats them when they turn unto him. Did not some of you, who are yourselves unconverted, once know persons who were at least as bad, perhaps more outwardly immoral than yourselves? Well, they have been converted, though you have not been; and when they were converted, what was their testimony? Did the blood of Christ avail to cleanse them? Oh, yes; and more than cleanse them, for it added to beauty not their own. They were naked once; was Jesus able to clothe them? Was there a sufficient covering in his righteousness? Ah, yes! and adornment was superadded; they received not a bare apparel, but a royal raiment. You have seen others thus liberally treated, does not this induce you also to come? Some of us need not confine our remarks to others, for we can speak personally of ourselves. We came to Jesus as full of sin as ever *you* can be, and felt ourselves beyond measure lost and ruined; but, oh, his tender love! I could sooner stand here and weep than speak to you of it. My soul melts in gratitude when I think of the infinite mercy of God to me

in that hour when I came seeking mercy at his hands. Oh! why will not you also come? May his Holy Spirit sweetly draw you! I proved that there was bread enough, mercy enough, forgiveness enough, and to spare. Come along, come along, poor guilty one; come along, there is room enough for thee.

Now, if the chief of sinners bear this witness, so do *the most obscure of saints*. If we could call forth from his seat a weak believer in God, who is almost unknown in the church, one who sometimes questions whether he is indeed a child of God, and would be willing to be a hired servant so long as he might belong to God, and if I were to ask him, "Now after all how has the Lord dealt with you?" what would be his reply? You have many afflictions, doubts and fears, but have you any complaints against your Lord? When you have waited upon him for daily grace, has he denied you? When you have been full of troubles, has he refused you comfort? When you have been plunged in distress, has he declined to deliver you? The Lord himself asks, "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel?" Testify against the Lord, ye his people, if ye have aught against him. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, whosoever there be in God's service who has found him a hard task-master, let him speak. Amongst the angels before Jehovah's throne, and amongst men redeemed on earth, if there be any one that can say he hath been dealt with unjustly or treated with ungenerous churlishness, let him lift up his voice! But there is not one. Even the devil himself when he spoke of God and of his servant Job, said, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" Of course he did not: God will not let his servants serve him for nought; he will pay them superabundant wages, and they shall all bear witness that at his table there is "bread enough and to spare." Now, if these still enjoy the bread of the Father's house, these who were once great sinners, these who are now only very commonplace saints, surely, sinner, it should encourage you to say, "I will arise and go to my Father," for his hired servants "have bread enough and to spare."

III. Notice in the third place, that the text dwells upon THE MULTITUDE OF THOSE WHO HAVE "BREAD ENOUGH AND TO SPARE." The prodigal lays an emphasis upon that word, "*How many* hired servants of my father's!" He was thinking of their great number, and counting them over. He thought of those that tended the cattle, of those that went out with the camels, of those that watched the sheep, and those that minded the corn, and those that waited in the house; he ran them over in his mind: his father was great in the land, and had many servants; yet he knew that they all had of the best food "enough and to spare." "Why should I perish with hunger? I am only one at any rate; though my hunger seem insatiable, it is but one belly that has to be filled, and, lo, my father fills hundreds, thousands every day; why should I perish with hunger?" Now, O thou awakened sinner, thou who dost feel this morning thy sin and misery, think of the numbers upon whom God has bestowed his grace already. Think of the countless hosts in heaven: if thou wert introduced there to-day, thou wouldst find it as easy to tell the stars, or the sands of the sea, as to count the multitudes that are before the throne even now.

They have come from the east and from the west, and they are sitting

down with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and there is room enough for thee. And beside those in heaven, think of those on earth. Blessed be God, his elect on earth are to be counted by millions, I believe, and the days are coming, brighter days than these, when there shall be multitudes upon multitudes brought to know the Saviour, and to rejoice in him. The Father's love is not for a few only, but for an exceeding great company. A number that no man can number will be found in heaven; now, a man can number a very great amount. Set to work your Newtons, your calculators, they can count great numbers, but God and God alone can tell the multitude of his redeemed. Now, sinner, thou art but one at any rate, great sinner as thou art, and the mercy of God which embraces millions must have room enough in it for thee. The sea which holds the whales and creeping things innumerable, dost thou say, "It will overflow its banks if I bathe therein"? The sun which floods the universe with light, canst thou say, "I should exhaust his beams if I should ask him to enlighten my darkness"? Say not so. If thou comest to thyself thou wilt not tolerate such a thought, but thou wilt remember with hope the richness of the Father's grace, even though thine own poverty stare thee in the face.

Let us add a few words to close with, close grappling words to some of you to whom God has sent his message this morning, and whom he intends to save. O you who have been long hearers of the gospel, and who know it well in theory, but have felt none of the power of it in your hearts, let me now remind you where and what you are! You are perishing. As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between you and death; but a step, nay, but a breath between you and hell. Sinner, if at this moment thy heart should cease its beating, and there are a thousand causes that might produce that result ere the clock ticks again, thou wouldst be in the flames of divine wrath. Canst thou bear to be in such peril? If you were hanging over a rock by a slender thread which must soon break, and if you would then fall headlong down a terrible precipice, you would not sleep, but be full of alarm. May you have sense enough, wit enough, grace enough, to be alarmed until you escape from the wrath to come.

Recollect, however, that while you are perishing, you are perishing in sight of plenty; you are famishing where a table is abundantly spread; what is more, there are those whom you know now sitting at that table and feasting. What sad perversity for a man to persist in being starved in the midst of a banquet, where others are being satisfied with good things!

But I think I hear you say, "I fear I have no right to come to Jesus." I will ask you this: have you any right to say that till you have been denied? Did you ever try to go to Christ? Has he ever rejected you? If then you have never received a repulse, why do you wickedly imagine that he would repel you? Wickedly, I say, for it is an offence against the Christ who opened his heart upon the cross, to imagine that he could repel a penitent. Have you any right to say, "But I am not one of those for whom mercy is provided"? Who told you so? Have you climbed to heaven and read the secret records of God election? Has the Lord revealed a strange decree to you, and said,

"Go and despair, I will have no pity on you"? If you say that God has so spoken, I do not believe you. In this sacred book is recorded what God has said, here is the sure word of testimony, and in it I find it said of no humble seeker that God hath shut him out from his grace. Why hast thou a right to invent such a fiction in order to secure thine own damnation? Instead thereof, there is much in the word of God and elsewhere to encourage thee in coming to Christ. He has not repelled one sinner yet; that is good to begin with: it is not likely that he would, for since he died to save sinners, why should he reject them when they seek to be saved? You say, "I am afraid to come to Christ." Is that wise? I have heard of a poor navigator who had been converted, who had but little education, but who knew the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and when dying, very cheerfully and joyfully longed to depart. His wife said to him, "But, mon, ain't ye afeared to stand before the judge?" "Woman," said he, "why should I be afeared of a man as died for me?" Oh, why should you be afraid of Christ who died for sinners? The idea of being afraid of him should be banished by the fact that he shed his blood for the guilty. You have much reason to believe from the very fact that he died, that he will receive you. Besides, you have his word for it, for he saith, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"—for no reason, and in no way, and on no occasion, and under no pretence, and for no motive. "I will not not cast him out," says the original. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." You say it is too good to be true that there can be pardon for you: this is a foolish measuring of God's corn with your bushel, and because it seems too good a thing for you to receive, you fancy it is too good for God to bestow. Let the greatness of the good news be one reason for believing that the news is true, for it is so like God.

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> Or who hath grace so rich and free?"

Because the gospel assures us that he forgives great sins through a great Saviour, it looks as if it were true, since he is so great a God.

What should be the result of all this with every sinner here at this time? I think this good news should arouse those who have almost gone to sleep through despair. The sailors have been pumping the vessel, the leaks are gaining, she is going down, the captain is persuaded she must be a wreck. Depressed by such evil tidings, the men refuse to work; and since the boats are all stove in and they cannot make a raft, they sit down in despair. Presently the captain has better news for them. "She will float," he says; "the wind is abating too, the pumps tell upon the water, the leak can be reached yet." See how they work; with what cheery courage they toil on, because there is hope! Soul, there is hope! *There is hope!* THERE IS HOPE! To the harlot, to the thief, to the drunkard.

"There is no hope," says Satan. Liar that thou art, get thee back to thy den; for thee there is no hope; but for fallen man, though he be in the mire of sin up to his very neck, though he be at the gates of death, while he lives there is hope. There is hope for hopeless souls in the Saviour.

In addition to arousing us this ought to elevate the sinner's thoughts. Some years ago, there was a crossing-sweeper in Dublin, with his broom, at the corner, and in all probability his highest thoughts were to keep the crossing clean, and look for the pence. One day, a lawyer put his hand upon his shoulder, and said to him, "My good fellow, do you know that you are heir to a fortune of ten thousand pounds a year?" "Do you mean it?" said he. "I do," he said. "I have just received the information; I am sure you are the man." He walked away, *and he forgot his broom.* Are you astonished? Why, who would not have forgotten a broom when suddenly made possessor of ten thousand a year? So, I pray that some poor sinners, who have been thinking of the pleasures of the world, when they hear that there is hope, and that there is heaven to be had, will forget the deceitful pleasures of sin, and follow after higher and better things.

Should it not also purify the mind? The prodigal, when he said, "I will arise and go to my father," became in a measure reformed from that very moment. How, say you? Why, he left the swine-trough: more, he left the wine cup, and he left the harlots. He did not go with the harlot on his arm, and the wine cup in his hand, and say, "I will take these with me, and go to my father." It could not be. These were all left, and though he had no goodness to bring, yet he did not try to keep his sins and come to Christ. I shall close with this remark, because it will act as a sort of *caveat*, and be a fit word to season the wide invitations of the free gospel. Some of you, I fear, will make mischief even out of the gospel, and will dare to take the cross and use it for a gibbet for your souls. If God is so merciful, you will go therefore and sin the more; and because grace is freely given, therefore you will continue in sin that grace may abound. If you do this, I would solemnly remind you I have no grace to preach to such as you. "Your damnation is just;" it is the word of inspiration, and the only one I know that is applicable to such as you are; but every needy, guilty soul that desires a Saviour is told to-day to believe in Jesus, that is, trust in the substitution and sacrifice of Christ, trust him to take your sin and blot it out; trust him to take your soul and save it. Trust Christ entirely, and you are forgiven this very moment; you are saved this very instant, and you may rejoice now in the fact that being justified by faith you have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. O come ye, come ye, come ye; come and welcome; come ye now to the Redeemer's blood. Holy Spirit, compel them to come in, that the house of mercy may be filled. Amen, and Amen.

Confession of Sin—A Sermon with Seven Texts

My sermon this morning will have seven texts, and yet I pledge myself that there shall be but three different words in the whole of them; for it so happens that the seven texts are all alike, occurring in seven different portions of God's Holy Word. I shall require, however, to use the whole of them to exemplify different cases; and I must request those of you who have brought your Bibles with you to refer to the texts as I shall mention them.

The subject of this morning's discourse will be this—CONFESSION OF SIN. We know that this is absolutely necessary to salvation. Unless there be a true and hearty confession of our sins to God, we have no promise that we shall find mercy through the blood of the Redeemer. "Whosoever confesseth his sins and forsaketh them shall find mercy." But there is no promise in the Bible to the man who will not confess his sins. Yet, as upon every point of Scripture there is a liability of being deceived, so more especially in the matter of confession of sin. There be many who make a confession, and a confession before God, who, notwithstanding, receive no blessing because their confession has not in it certain marks which are required by God to prove it genuine and sincere, and which demonstrate it to be the work of the Holy Spirit. My text this morning consists of three words, "I have sinned." And you will see how these words, in the lips of different men, indicate very different feelings. While one says, "I have sinned," and receives forgiveness; another we shall meet with says, "I have sinned," and goes his way to blacken himself with worse crimes than before, and dive into greater depths of sin than heretofore he had discovered.

The Hardened Sinner.

PHARAOH—"I have sinned."—*Exodus ix.* 27.

I. The first case I shall bring before you is that of the HARDENED SINNER, who, when under terror, says, "I have sinned." And you will find the text in the book of Exodus, the 9th chap, and 27th verse: "And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked."

But why this confession from the lips of the haughty tyrant? He was not often wont to humble himself before Jehovah. Why doth the proud one bow himself? You will judge of the value of his confession when you hear the circumstances under which it was made. "And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So that

there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." "Now," says Pharaoh, whilst the thunder is rolling through the sky, while the lightning-flashes are setting the very ground on fire, and while the hail is descending in big lumps of ice, now, says he: "I have sinned." He is but a type and specimen of multitudes of the same class. How many a hardened rebel on shipboard, when the timbers are strained and creaking, when the mast is broken, and the ship is drifting before the gale, when the hungry waves are opening their mouths to swallow the ship up alive and quick as those that go into the pit—how many a hardened sailor has then bowed his knee, with tears in his eyes, and cried, "I have sinned!" But of what avail and of what value was his confession? The repentance that was born in the storm died in the calm; that repentance of his that was begotten amidst the thunder and lightning, ceased so soon as all was hushed in quiet, and the man who was a pious mariner when on board ship, became the most wicked and abominable of sailors when he placed his foot on *terra firma*. How often, too, have we seen this in a storm of thunder and lightning? Many a man's cheek is blanched when he hears the thunder rolling; the tears start to his eyes, and he cries, "O God, I have sinned!" while the rafters of his house are shaking, and the very ground beneath him reeling at the voice of God which is full of majesty. But alas, for such a repentance! When the sun again shines, and the black clouds are withdrawn, sin comes again upon the man, and he becomes worse than before. How many of the same sort of confessions, too, have we seen in times of cholera, and fever, and pestilence! Then our churches have been crammed with hearers, who, because so many funerals have passed their doors, or so many have died in the street, could not refrain from going up to God's house to confess their sins. And under that visitation, when one, two, and three have been lying dead in the house, or next door, how many have thought they would really turn to God! But, alas! when the pestilence had done its work, conviction ceased; and when the bell had tolled the last time for a death caused by cholera, then their hearts ceased to beat with penitence, and their tears did flow no more.

Have I any such here this morning? I doubt not I have hardened persons who would scorn the very idea of religion, who would count me a cant and hypocrite if I should endeavour to press it home upon them, but who know right well that religion is true, and who feel it in their times of terror! If I have such here this morning, let me solemnly say to them, "Sirs, you have forgotten the feelings you had in your hours of alarm; but, remember, God has not forgotten the vows you then made." Sailor, you said if God would spare you to see the land again, you would be His servant; you are not so, you have lied against God, you have made him a false promise, for you have never kept the vow which your lips did utter. You said, on a bed of sickness, that if He would spare your life you would never again sin as you did before; but here you are, and this week's sins shall speak for themselves. You are no better than you were before your sickness. Couldst thou lie to thy fellow-man, and yet go unreproved? And thinkest thou that thou wilt lie against God, and yet go unpunished? No; the vow, however rashly made, is registered in heaven; and though it be a vow which man cannot perform, yet, as it is a vow which he has made himself, and made voluntarily, too, he shall be punished for the non-keeping it; and God shall execute vengeance upon him at last, because he said he would turn from his ways, and then when the blow was removed he did it not. A great outcry has been raised of late against tickets-of-leave; I have no doubt there are some men here, who before high heaven stand in the same position as the ticket-of-leave men stand to our Government. They were about to die, as they thought; they promised good behaviour if they might be spared, and they are here to-day on ticket-of-leave in this world: and how have they fulfilled their promise? Justice might raise the same outcry against them as they do against the burglars so constantly let loose upon us. The avenging angel might say, "O God, these men said, if they were spared they would be so much better; if anything, they are worse.

How have they violated their promise, and how have they brought down divine wrath upon their heads!" This is the first style of penitence; and it is a style I hope none of you will imitate, for it is utterly worthless. It is of no use for you to say, "I have sinned," merely under the influence of terror, and then to forget it afterwards.

The Double-Minded Man.

BALAAM—"I have sinned."—*Numbers xxii.* 34.

II.—Now for a second text. I beg to introduce to you another character—the *double-minded man*, who says, "I have sinned," and feels that he has, and feels it deeply, too, but who is so worldly-minded that he "loves the wages of unrighteousness." The character I have chosen to illustrate this is that of *Balaam*. Turn to the book of Numbers, the 22nd chap. and the 34th verse: "And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned."

"I have sinned," said Balaam; but yet he went on with his sin afterwards. One of the strangest characters of the whole world is Balaam. I have often marvelled at that man; he seems really in another sense to have come up to the lines of Ralph Erskine:—

> "To good and evil equal bent,
> And both a devil and a saint."

For he did seem to be so. At times no man could speak more eloquently and more truthfully, and at other times he exhibited the most mean and sordid covetousness that could disgrace human nature. Think you see Balaam; he stands upon the brow of the hill, and there lie the multitudes of Israel at his feet; he is bidden to curse them, and he cries, "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?" And God opening his eyes, he begins to tell even about the coming of Christ, and he says, "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh." And then he winds up his oration by saying, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" And ye will say of that man, he is a hopeful character. Wait till he has come off the brow of the hill, and ye will hear him give the most diabolical advice to the King of Moab which it was even possible for Satan himself to suggest. Said he to the king, "You cannot overthrow these people in battle, for God is with them; try and entice them from their God." And ye know how with wanton lusts they of Moab tried to entice the children of Israel from allegiance to Jehovah; so that this man seemed to have the voice of an angel at one time, and yet the very soul of a devil in his bowels. He was a terrible character; he was a man of two things, a man who went all the way with two things to a very great extent. I know the Scripture says, "No man can serve two masters." Now this is often misunderstood. Some read it, "No man can *serve two* masters." Yes he can; he can serve three or four. The way to read it is this: "No man can serve two *masters*." They cannot both be masters. He can serve two, but they cannot both be his master. A man can serve two who are not his masters, or twenty either; he may live for twenty different purposes, but he cannot live for more than one master purpose—there can only be one master purpose in his soul. But Balaam laboured to serve two; it was like the people of whom it was said, "They feared the Lord, and served other gods." Or like Rufus, who was a loaf of the same leaven; for you know our old King Rufus painted God on one side of his shield, and the devil on the other, and had underneath, the motto, "Ready for both; catch who can." There are many such, who are ready for both. They meet a minister, and how pious and holy they are; on the Sabbath they are the most respectable and upright people in the world, as you would think; indeed, they affect a drawling in their speech, which they think to be eminently religious. But on weekday, if you want to find the greatest rogues and cheats, they are some of those men who are so sanctimonious in their piety. Now, rest assured, my hearers, that no confession of sin can be genuine unless it be a whole-hearted one. It is of no use for you to say, "I have sinned," and then keep on sinning. "I have sinned," say you, and it is a fair, fair face you show; but,

alas! alas! for the sin you will go away and commit. Some men seem to be born with two characters. I remarked when in the library at Trinity College, Cambridge, a very fine statue of Lord Byron. The librarian said to me, "Stand here, sir." I looked, and I said, "What a fine intellectual countenance! What a grand genius he was!" "Come here," he said, "to the other side." "Ah, what a demon! There stands the man that could defy the deity." He seemed to have such a scowl and such a dreadful leer in his face; even as Milton would have painted Satan when he said, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." I turned away and said to the librarian, "Do you think the artist designed this?" "Yes," he said, "he wished to picture the two characters—the great, the grand, the almost superhuman genius that he possessed, and yet the enormous mass of sin that was in his soul." There are some men here of the same sort. I dare say, like Balaam, they would overthrow everything in argument with their enchantments; they could work miracles; and yet at the same time there is something about them which betrays a horrid character of sin, as great as that which would appear to be their character for righteousness. Balaam, you know, offered sacrifices to God upon the altar of Baal: that was just the type of his character. So many do; they offer sacrifices to God on the shrine of Mammon; and whilst they will give to the building of a church, and distribute to the poor, they will at the other door of their counting-house grind the poor for bread, and press the very blood out of the widow, that they may enrich themselves. Ah! it is idle and useless for you to say, "I have sinned," unless you mean it from your heart. That double-minded man's confession is of no avail.

The Insincere Man.

SAUL—"I have sinned."—1 *Samuel xv.* 24.

III. And now a third character and a third text. In the first book of Samuel, the 15th chap., and 24th verse: "And *Saul* said unto Samuel, I have sinned."

Here is the *insincere man*—the man who is not like Balaam, to a certain extent sincere in two things; but the man who is just the opposite—who has no prominent point in his character at all, but is moulded everlastingly by the circumstances that are passing over his head. Such a man was *Saul*. Samuel reproved him, and he said, "I have sinned." But he did not mean what he said: for if you read the whole verse you will find him saying, "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words; because I feared the people"; which was a lying excuse. Saul never feared anybody; he was always ready enough to do his own will—he was the despot. And just before he had pleaded another excuse, that he had saved the bullocks and lambs to offer to Jehovah, and therefore both excuses could not have been true. You remember, my friends, that the most prominent feature in the character of Saul was his insincerity. One day he fetched David from his bed, as he thought, to put him to death in his house. Another time he declares, "God forbid that I should do aught against thee, my son David." One day, because David saved his life, he said, "Thou art more righteous than I; I will do so no more." The day before he had gone out to fight against his own son-in-law, in order to slay him. Sometimes Saul was among the prophets, easily turned into a prophet, and then afterwards among the witches; sometimes in one place, and then another, and insincere in everything. How many such we have in every Christian assembly; men who are very easily moulded! Say what you please to them, they always agree with you. They have affectionate dispositions, very likely a tender conscience; but then the conscience is so remarkably tender, that when touched it seems to give, and you are afraid to probe deeper—it heals as soon as it is wounded. I think I used the very singular comparison once before, which I must use again; there are some men who seem to have indiarubber hearts. If you do but touch them, there is an impression made at once; but then it is of no use, it soon restores itself to its original character. You may press them whatever way you wish, they are so elastic you can always effect your purpose; but

then they are not fixed in their character, and soon return to be what they were before. O sirs, too many of you have done the same; you have bowed your heads in church, and said, "We have erred and strayed from thy ways"; and you did not mean what you said. You have come to your minister; you have said, "I repent of my sins"; you did not then feel you were a sinner; you only said it to please him. And now you attend the House of God; no one more impressible than you; the tear will run down your cheek in a moment, but yet, notwithstanding all that, the tear is dried as quickly as it is brought orth, and you remain to all intents and purposes the same as you were before. To say, "I have sinned," in an unmeaning manner, is worse than worthless, for it is a mockery of God thus to confess with insincerity of heart.

I have been brief upon this character; for it seemed to touch upon that of Balaam; though any thinking man will at once see there was a real contrast between Saul and Balaam, even though there is an affinity between the two. Balaam was the great bad man, great in all he did; Saul was little in everything except in stature—little in his good and little in his vice; and he was too much of a fool to be desperately bad, though too wicked to be at any time good; while Balaam was great in both: the man who could at one time defy Jehovah, and yet at another time could say, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more."

The Doubtful Penitent.

ACHAN—"I have sinned."—*Joshua vii.* 20.

IV. And now I have to introduce to you a very interesting case; it is the case of the doubtful penitent, the case of *Achan*, in the book of Joshua, the 7th chap. and the 20th verse. "And Achan answered Joshua, indeed I have sinned."

You know that Achan stole some of the prey from the city of Jericho—that he was discovered by lot, and put to death. I have singled this case out as the representative of some whose characters are doubtful on their death-beds; who do repent apparently, but of whom the most we can say is, that we hope their souls are saved at last, but indeed we cannot tell. Achan, you are aware, was stoned with stones, for defiling Israel. But I find in the Mishna, an old Jewish exposition of the Bible, these words, "Joshua said to Achan, the Lord shall trouble thee *this* day." And the note upon it is—"He said *this* day, implying that he was only to be troubled in this life, by being stoned to death, but that God would have mercy on his soul, seeing that he had made a full confession of his sin." And I, too, am inclined, from reading the chapter, to concur in the idea of my venerable and now glorified predecessor, Dr. Gill, in believing that Achan really was saved, although he was put to death for the crime as an example. For you will observe how kindly Joshua spoke to him. He said, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me." And you find Achan making a very full confession. He says, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done. When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it." It seems so full a confession, that if I might be allowed to judge, I should say, "I hope to meet Achan the sinner, before the throne of God." But I find Matthew Henry has no such opinion; and many other expositors consider that as his body was destroyed, so was his soul. I have, therefore, selected his case, as being one of doubtful repentance. Ah! dear friends, it has been my lot to stand by many a death-bed, and to see many such a repentance as this; I have seen the man, when worn to a skeleton, sustained by pillows in his bed; and he has said, when I have talked to him of judgment to come, "Sir I feel I have been guilty, but Christ is good; I trust in Him." And I have said within myself, "I believe

the man's soul is safe." But I have always come away with the melancholy reflection that I had no proof of it, beyond his own words; for it needs proof in acts and in future life, in order to sustain any firm conviction of a man's salvation. You know that great fact, that a physician once kept a record of a thousand persons who thought they were dying, and whom he thought were penitents; he wrote their names down in a book as those, who, if they had died, would go to heaven; they did not die, they lived; and he says that out of the whole thousand he had not three persons who turned out well afterwards, but they returned to their sins again, and were as bad as ever. Ah! dear friends, I hope none of you will have such a death-bed repentance as that; I hope your minister or your parents will not have to stand by your bedside, and then go away and say, "Poor fellow, I hope he is saved But alas! death-bed repentances are such flimsy things; such poor, such trivial grounds of hope, that I am afraid, after all, his soul may be lost." Oh! to die with a full assurance; oh! to die with an abundant entrance, leaving a testimony behind that we have departed this life in peace That is a far happier way than to die in a doubtful manner, lying sick, hovering between two worlds, and neither ourselves nor yet our friends knowing to which of the two worlds we are going. May God grant us grace to give in our lives evidences of true conversion, that our case may not be doubtful!

The Repentance of Despair.

JUDAS—"I have sinned."—*Matthew xxvii. 4.*

V. I shall not detain you too long, I trust, but I must now give you another bad case; the worst of all. It is the REPENTANCE OF DESPAIR. Will you turn to the 27th chap. of Matthew, and the 4th verse? There you have a dreadful case of the repentance of despair. You will recognise the character the moment I read the verse: "And Judas said, I have sinned." Yes, Judas the traitor, who had betrayed his Master, when he saw that his Master was condemned, "repented, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood, and cast down the pieces in the temple, and went" and what?—"and *hanged himself.*" Here is the worst kind of repentance of all; in fact, I know not that I am justified in calling it repentance; it must be called remorse of conscience. But Judas did confess his sin, and then went and hanged himself. Oh! that dreadful, that terrible, that hideous confession of despair. Have you never seen it? If you never have, then bless God that you never were called to see such a sight. I have seen it once in my life, I pray God I may never see it again—the repentance of the man who sees death staring him in the face, and who says, "I have sinned." You tell him that Christ has died for sinners; and he answers, "There is no hope for me; I have cursed God to His face; I have defied Him; my day of grace I know is past; my conscience is seared with a hot iron; I am dying, and I know I shall be lost!" Such a case as that happened long ago, you know, and is on record—the case of Francis Spira—the most dreadful case, perhaps, except that of Judas, which is upon record in the memory of man. Oh! my hearers, will any of you have such a repentance? If you do, it will be a beacon to all persons who sin in future; if you have such a repentance as that, it will be a warning to generations yet to come. In the life of Benjamin Keach—and he also was one of my predecessors—I find the case of a man who had been a professor of religion, but had departed from the profession, and had gone into awful sin. When he came to die, Keach, with many other friends, went to see him, but they could never stay with him above five minutes at a time; for he said, "Get ye gone; it is of no use your coming to me; I have sinned away the Holy Ghost; I am like Esau, I have sold my birthright, and though I seek it carefully with tears, I can never find it again." And then he would repeat dreadful words, like these: "My mouth is filled with gravel stones, and I drink wormwood day and night. Tell me not, tell me not of Christ! I know He is a Saviour, but I hate Him and He hates me. I know I must die; I know I must perish!" And

then followed doleful cries, and hideous noises, such as none could bear. They returned again in his placid moments, only to stir him up once more, and make him cry out in his despair, "I am lost! I am lost! It is of no use your telling me anything about it!" Ah! there may be a man here who may have such a death as that; let me warn him ere he come to it; and may God the Holy Spirit grant that that man may be turned unto God, and made a true penitent, and then he need not have any more fear; for he who has had his sins washed away in a Saviour's blood, need not have any remorse for his sins, for they are pardoned through the Redeemer.

The Repentance of the Saint.

JOB—"I have sinned."—*Job. vii.* 20.

VI. And now I come into daylight. I have been taking you through dark and dreary confessions; I shall detain you there no longer, but bring you out to the two good confessions which I have read to you. The first is that of Job in 7th chap., at the 20th verse: "I have sinned; what shall I do unto Thee, O Thou preserver of men?" This is the *repentance of the saint.* Job was a saint, but he sinned. This is the repentance of the man who is a child of God already, an acceptable repentance before God. But as I intend to dwell upon this in the evening, I shall now leave it, for fear of wearying you. David was a specimen of this kind of repentance, and I would have you carefully study his penitential psalms, the language of which is ever full of weeping humility and earnest penitence.

The Blessed Confession.

THE PRODIGAL—"I have sinned."—*Luke xv.* 18.

VII. I come now to the last instance which I shall mention, it is the case of the prodigal. In Luke xv. 18, we find the prodigal says: "Father I have sinned." Oh, here is *a blessed confession*! Here is that which proves a man to be a regenerate character—"Father, I have sinned." Let me picture the scene. There is the prodigal; he has run away from a good home and a kind father, and he has spent all his money with harlots, and now he has none left. He goes to his old companions, and asks them for relief. They laugh him to scorn. "Oh," says he, "you have drunk my wine many a day; I have always stood paymaster to you in all our revelries; will you not help me?" "Get you gone," they say; and he is turned out of doors. He goes to all his friends with whom he had associated, but no man gives him anything. At last a certain citizen of the country said, "You want something to do, do you? Well, go and feed my swine." The poor prodigal, the son of a rich landowner, who had a great fortune of his own, has to go out to feed swine; and he a Jew, too!—the worst employment (to his mind) to which he could be put. See him there, in squalid rags, feeding swine; and what are his wages? Why, so little, that he "would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine eat, but no man gave to him." Look, there he is, with the fellow-commoners of the sty, in all his mire and filthiness. Suddenly a thought put there by the good Spirit, strikes his mind. "How is it," says he, "that in my father's house there is bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Off he goes. He begs his way from town to town. Sometimes he gets a lift on a coach, perhaps, but at other times he goes trudging his way up barren hills and down desolate vales, all alone. And now at last he comes to the hill outside the village, and sees his father's house down below. There it is; the old poplar tree against it, and there are the stacks round which he and his brother used to run and play; and at the sight of the old homestead all the feelings and associations of his former life rush upon him, and tears run down his cheeks, and he is almost ready to run away again. He says, "I wonder whether father's dead. I daresay mother broke

her heart when I went away; I always was her favourite. And if they are either of them alive, they will never see me again; they will shut the door in my face. What am I to do? I cannot go back, I am afraid to go forward." And while he was thus deliberating, his father had been walking on the housetop, looking out for his son; and though he could not see his father, his father could see him. Well, the father comes downstairs with all his might, runs up to him, and whilst he is thinking of running away, his father's arms are round his neck, and he falls-to kissing him, like a loving father indeed, and then the son begins—"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," and he was going to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." But his father put his hand on his mouth. "No more of that," says he; "I forgive you all; you shall not say anything about being a hired servant—I will have none of that. Come along," says he, "come in, poor prodigal. Ho!" says he to the servants, "bring hither the best robe, and put it on him, and put shoes on his poor bleeding feet; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry." Oh, what a precious reception for one of the chief of sinners! Good Matthew Henry says, "His father saw him, there were eyes of mercy; he ran to meet him, there were legs of mercy; he put his arms round his neck, there were arms of mercy; he kissed him, there were kisses of mercy; he said to him—there were words of mercy,—Bring hither the best robe, there were deeds of mercy, wonders of mercy—all mercy. Oh, what a God of mercy he is."

Now, prodigal, you do the same. Has God put it into your heart? There are many who have been running away for a long time now. Does God say, "Return?" Oh, I bid you return then, for as surely as ever thou dost return He will take thee in. There never was a poor sinner yet who came to Christ, whom Christ turned away. If He turns you away, you will be the first. Oh, if you could but try Him! "Ah, sir, I am so black, so filthy, so vile." Well, come along with you—you cannot be blacker than the prodigal. Come to your Father's House, and as surely as He is God He will keep His word—"Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

Oh, if I might hear that some had come to Christ this morning, I would indeed bless God! I must tell here, for the honour of God and Christ, one remarkable circumstance, and then I have done. You will remember that one morning I mentioned the case of an infidel who had been a scorner and scoffer, but who, through reading one of my printed sermons, had been brought to God's house and then to God's feet. Well, last Christmas day, the same infidel gathered together all his books, and went into the market-place at Norwich, and there made a public recantation of all his errors, and a profession of Christ, and then taking up all his books which he had written, and had in his house, on evil subjects, burned them in the sight of the people. I have blessed God for such a wonder of grace as that, and pray that there may be many more such, who, though they be born prodigal, will yet return home, saying, "I have sinned."

The Turning Point

"And he arose, and came to his father"—Luke xv. 20.

THIS sentence expresses the true turning point in the prodigal's life story. Many other matters led up to it, and before he came to it there was much in him that was very hopeful; but this was the point itself, and had he never reached it he would have remained a prodigal, but would never have been the prodigal restored, and his life would have been a warning rather than an instruction to us. "He arose, and came to his father." Speaking, as I do, in extreme weakness, I have no words to spare; and while my voice holds out I shall speak straight to the point, and I pray the Lord to make every syllable practical and powerful by his Holy Spirit.

I. We shall begin by noticing that HERE WAS ACTION—"*He arose, and came to his father.*" He had already been in a state of thoughtfulness; he had come to himself, but now he was to go further, and come to his father. He had considered the past, and weighed it up, and seen the hollowness of all the world's pleasures; he had seen his condition in reference to his father, and his prospects if he remained in the far-off country; he had thought upon what he ought to do, and what would be the probable result of such a course; but now he passed beyond the dreaminess of thought into matter-of-fact acting and doing. How long will it be, dear hearers, before you will do the same? We are glad to have you thoughtful; we hope that a great point is gained when you are led to consider your ways, to ponder your condition, and to look earnestly into the future, for thoughtlessness is the ruin of many a traveller to eternity, and by its means the unwary fall into the deep pit of carnal security and perish therein. But some of you have been among the "thoughtful" quite long enough; it is time you passed into a more practical stage. It is high time that you came to action; it would have been better if you had acted already; for, in the matter of reconciliation to God, first thoughts are best. When a man's life hangs

on a thread, and hell is just before him, his path is clear, and a second thought is superfluous. The first impulse to escape from danger and lay hold on Christ is that which you would be wise to follow. Some of you whom I now address have been thinking, and thinking, and thinking, till I fear that you will think yourselves into perdition. May you, by divine grace, be turned from thinking to believing, or else your thoughts will become the undying worm of your torment.

The prodigal had also passed beyond mere regret. He was deeply grieved that he had left his father's house, he lamented his lavish expenditure upon wantonness and revelling, he mourned that the son of such a father should be degraded into a swineherd in a foreign land; but he now proceeded from regret to repentance, and bestirred himself to escape from the condition over which he mourned. What is the use of regret if we continue in sin? By all means pull up the sluices of your grief if the floods will turn the wheel of action, but you may as well reserve your tears, if they mean no more than idle sentimentalism. What avails it for a man to say he repents of his misconduct if he still perseveres in it? We are glad when sinners regret their sin and mourn the condition into which sin has brought them, but if they go no further, their regrets will only prepare them for eternal remorse. Had the prodigal become inactive through despondency, or stolid through sullen grief, he must have perished, far away from his father's home, as it is to be feared many will whose sorrow for sin leads them into a proud unbelief and wilful despair of God's love; but he was wise, for he shook off the drowsiness of his despondency, and, with resolute determination, "arose and came to his father." Oh, when will you sad ones be wise enough to do the same? When will your thinking and your sorrowing give place to practical obedience to the gospel?

The prodigal also pressed beyond mere resolving. That is a sweet verse which says, "I will arise," but that is far better which says, "And he arose." Resolves are good, like blossoms, but actions are better, for they are the fruits. We are glad to hear from you the resolution, "I will turn to God," but holy angels in heaven do not rejoice over resolutions, they reserve their music for sinners who actually repent. Many of you like the son in the parable have said, "I go, sir," but you have not gone. You are as ready at forgetting as you are at resolving. Every earnest sermon, every death in your family, every funeral knell for a neighbour, every pricking of conscience, every touch of sickness, sets you a resolving to amend, but your promissory notes are never honoured, your repentance ends in words. Your goodness is as the dew, which at early dawn hangs each blade of grass with gems, but leaves the fields all parched and dry when the sun's burning heat is poured upon the pasture. You mock your friends, and trifle with your own souls. You have often in this house said, "Let me reach my chamber and I will fall upon my knees," but on the way home you have forgotten what manner of men you were, and sin has confirmed its tottering throne. Have you not dallied long enough? Have you not lied unto God sufficiently? Should you not now give over resolving and proceed to the solemn business of your souls like men of common sense? You are in a sinking vessel, and the life-boat is near, but your mere resolve to enter it will not prevent your going

down with the sinking craft; as sure as you are a living man, you will drown unless you take the actual leap for life.

"He arose and came to his father." Now, observe that *this action of the prodigal was immediate*, and without further parley. He did not go back to the citizen of that country and say, "Will you raise my wages? If not, I must leave." Had he parleyed he had been lost; but he gave his old master no notice, he cancelled his indentures by running away. I would that sinners here would break their league with death, and violate their covenant with hell, by escaping for their lives to Jesus, who receives all such runaways. We want neither leave nor licence for quitting the service of sin and Satan, neither is it a subject which demands a month's consideration: in this matter instantaneous action is the surest wisdom. Lot did not stop to consult the king of Sodom as to whether he might quit his dominions, neither did he consult the parish officers as to the propriety of speedily deserting his home; but with the angel's hand pressing them, he and his fled from the city. Nay, one fled not; she looked and lingered, and that lingering cost her her life! That pillar of salt is the eloquent monitor to us to avoid delays when we are bidden to flee for our lives. Sinner, dost thou wish to be a pillar of salt? Wilt thou halt between two opinions, until God's anger shall doom thee to final impenitence? Wilt thou trifle with mercy till justice smite thee? Up, man, and while thy day of grace continues, fly thou into the arms of love.

The text implies that *the prodigal aroused himself*, and put forth all his energies. It is said, "he *arose;*" the word suggests that he had till then been asleep upon the bed of sloth, or the couch of presumption. Like Samson in Delilah's lap, he had been supine, inactive, and unstrung; but now, startled from his lethargy, he lifts up his eyes, he girds up his loins, he shakes off the spell which had enthralled him, he puts forth every power, he arouses his whole nature, and he spares no exertion until he returns to his father.

Men are not saved between sleeping and waking. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Grace does not stupefy us, it but arouses us. Surely, sirs, it is worth while making an awful effort to escape from eternal wrath. It is worth while summoning up every faculty and power and emotion and passion of your being, and saying to yourself, "I cannot be lost; I will not be lost: I am resolved that I will find mercy through Jesus Christ." The worst of it is, O sinners, ye are so sluggish, so indifferent, so ready to let things happen as they may. Sin has bewitched and benumbed you. You sleep as on beds of down and forget that you are in danger of hell fire. You cry, "A little more rest, and a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the arms to sleep," and so you sleep on, though your damnation slumbereth not. Would to God you could be awakened. It is not in the power of my voice to arouse you; but may the Lord Himself alarm you, for never were men more in danger. Let but your breath fail, or your blood pause, and you are lost for ever. Frailer than a cobweb is that life on which your eternal destiny depends. If you were wise you would not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, till you had found your God and been forgiven. Oh, when will you come to a real action? How long will it be er-

you believe in Jesus? How long will you sport between the jaws of hell? How long dare you provoke the living God?

II. Secondly, HERE WAS A SOUL COMING INTO ACTUAL CONTACT WITH GOD,—"*He arose and came to his father.*" It would have been of no avail for him to have arisen if he had not come to his father. This is what the sinner has to do, and what the Spirit enables him to do: namely, to come straight away to his God. But, alas! very commonly, when men begin to be anxious, they go round about and hasten to a friend to tell him about it, or they even resort to a deceitful priest, and seek help from him. They fly to a saint or a virgin, and ask these to be mediators for them, instead of accepting the only Mediator Jesus Christ, and going to God at once by him. They fly to outward forms and ceremonies, or they turn to their Bibles, their prayers, their repentances, or their sermon-hearings; in fact, to anything rather than their God. But the prodigal knew better; he went to his father, and it will be a grand day for you, O sinner, when you do the same. Go straight away to your God in Christ Jesus. "Come here," says the priest. Pass that fellow by. Get away to your Father. Reject an angel from heaven if he would detain you from the Lord. Go personally, directly, and at once to God in Christ Jesus. But surely I must perform some ceremony first? Not so did the prodigal, he arose and went at once to his father. Sinner, you must come to God, and Jesus is the way; go to him then, tell him you have done wrong, confess your sins to him, and yield yourself to him. Cry, "Father, I have sinned: forgive me, for Jesus' sake."

Alas! there are many anxious souls who do not go to others, but they look to themselves. They sit down and cry, "I want to repent; I want to feel my need; I want to be humble." O man, get up! What are you at? Leave yourself and go to your Father. "Oh, but I have so little hope; my faith is very weak, and I am full of fears." What matters your hopes or your fears while you are away from your Father? Your salvation does not lie within yourself, but in the Lord's good will to you. You will never be at peace till, leaving all your doubts and your hopes, you come to your God and rest in his bosom. "Oh, but I want to conquer my propensities to sin, I want to master my strong temptations." I know what it is you want. You want the best robe without your Father's giving it you, and shoes on your feet of your own procuring; you do not like going in a beggar's suit and receiving all from the Lord's loving hand; but this pride of yours must be given up, and you must get away to God, or perish for ever. You must forget yourself, or only remember yourself so as to feel that you are bad throughout, and no more worthy to be called God's son. Give yourself up as a sinking vessel that is not worth pumping, but must be left to go down, and get you into the life-boat of free grace. Think of God your Father—of him, I say, and of his dear Son, the one Mediator and Redeemer of the sons of men. There is your hope—to fly away from self and to reach your Father.

Do I hear you say, "Well, I shall continue in the means of grace, and I hope there to find my God." I tell you, if you do that, and refuse to go to God, the means of grace will be the means of damnation to you. "I must wait at the pool," says one. Then I solemnly

warn you that you will lie there and die; for Jesus does not command you to lie there, his bidding is, "Take up thy bed, and walk." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." You have to go unto your Father, and not to the pool of Bethesda, or any other pool of ordinances or means of grace. "But I mean to pray," says one. What would you pray for? Can you expect the Lord to hear you while you will not hear him? You will pray best with your head in your Father's bosom, but the prayers of an unyielding, disobedient, unbelieving heart are mockeries. Prayers themselves will ruin you if they are made a substitute for going at once to God. Suppose the prodigal had sat down at the swine trough and said, "I will pray here," what would it have availed him? or suppose he had wept there, what good would have come of it? Praying and weeping were good enough when he had come to his father, but they could not have been substituted for it. Sinner, your business is with God. Hasten to him at once. You have nothing to do with yourself, or your own doings, or what others can do for you, the turning point of salvation is, "he arose and came to his father." There must be a real, living, earnest, contact of your poor guilty soul with God, a recognition that there is a God, and that God can be spoken to, and an actual speech of your soul to him, through Jesus Christ, for it is only God in Christ Jesus that is accessible at all. Going thus to God, we tell him that we are all wrong, and want to be set right; we tell him we wish to be reconciled to him, and are ashamed that we should have sinned against him; we then put our trust in his Son, and we are saved. O soul, go to God: it matters not though the prayer you come with may be a very broken prayer, or even if it has mistakes in it, as the prodigal's prayer had when he said, "Make me as one of thy hired servants;" the language of the prayer will not signify so long as you really approach to God. "Him that cometh to me," says Jesus, "I will in no wise cast out;" and Jesus ever liveth to make intercessions for them that come to God through him.

Here, then, is the great Protestant doctrine. The Romish doctrine says you must go round by the back door, and half-a-dozen of the Lord's servants must knock for you, and even then you may never be heard; but the grand old Protestant doctrine is, come to God yourself; come with no other mediator than Jesus Christ; come just as you are without merits and good works; trust in Jesus and your sins will be forgiven you.

There is my second point: there was action, and that action was contact with God.

III. Now, thirdly, IN THAT ACTION THERE WAS AN ENTIRE YIELDING UP OF HIMSELF. In the prodigal's case, his proud independence and self-will were gone. In other days he demanded his portion, and resolved to spend it as he pleased, but now he is willing to be as much under rule as a hired servant, he has had enough of being his own master, and is weary of the distance from God which self-will always creates. He longs to get into a child's true place, namely, that of dependence and loving submission. The great mischief of all was his distance from his father, and he now feels it to be so. His great thought is to remove that distance by humbly returning, for then he feels that all other ills will come to an end. He yields up his

cherished freedom, his boasted independence, his liberty to think and do and say whatever he chose, and he longs to come under loving rule and wise guidance. Sinner, are you ready for this? If so, come and welcome; your father longs to press you to his bosom!

He gave up all idea of self-justification, for he said, "I have *sinned.*" Before he would have said, "I have a right to do as I like with my own; who is to dictate how I shall spend my own money. If I do sow a few wild oats, every young man does the same. I have been very generous, if nothing else; nobody can call me greedy. I am no hypocrite. Look at your canting Methodists, how they deceive people! There's nothing of that in me, I'll warrant you; I am an outspoken man of the world; and after all, a good deal better in disposition than my elder brother, fine fellow though he pretends to be." But now the prodigal boasts no longer. Not a syllable of self-praise falls from his lips; he mournfully confesses, "I have sinned against heaven and before thee." Sinner, if you would be saved you also must come down from your high places, and acknowledge your iniquity. Confess that you have done wrong, and do not try to extenuate your offence; do not offer apologies and make your case better than it is, but humbly plead guilty and leave your soul in Jesu's hands. Of two things, to sin or to deny the sin, probably to deny the sin is the worse of the two, and shows a blacker heart. Acknowledge your fault, man, and tell your heavenly Father that if it were not for his mercy you would have been in hell, and that as it is you richly deserve to be there even now. Make your case rather blacker than it is if you can; this I say because I know you cannot do any such thing. When a man is in the hospital it cannot be of any service to him to pretend to be better than he is; he will not receive any more medical attention on that account, but rather the other way, for the worse his case the more likely is the physician to give him special notice. Oh, sinner, lay bare before God thy sores, thy putrifying sores of sin, the horrid ulcers of thy deep depravity, and cry, "O Lord, have mercy upon me?" This is the way of wisdom. Have done with pride and self-righteousness, and make thy appeal to the undeserved pity of the Lord, and thou will speed.

Observe that the prodigal yielded up himself so thoroughly that he owned his father's love to him to be an aggravation of his guilt: so I take it he means when he says, "Father, I have sinned." It adds an emphasis to the "*I have sinned*" when it follows after the word "*father.*" "Thou good God, I have broken thy good laws; thou loving, tender, merciful God, I have done wrong wantonly and wickedly against thee. Thou hast been a very loving Father to me, and I have been a most ungenerons and shameless traitor to thee, rebelling without cause. I confess this frankly and humbly, and with many tears. Ah! hadst thou been a tyrant I might have gathered some apology from thy severity, but thou hast been a Father, and this makes it worse that I should sin against thee." It is sweet to hear such a confession as this poured out into the Father's bosom.

The penitent also yielded up all his supposed rights and claims upon his father, saying, "I am not worthy to be called thy son." He might have said, "I have sinned, but still I am thy child," and most of us would have thought it a very justifiable argument; but he does not

say so, he is too humble for that, he owns, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." A sinner is really broken down when he acknowledges that if God would have no mercy on him, but cast him away for for ever, it would be no more than justice.

> "Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
> I must pronounce thee just in death;
> And, if my soul were sent to hell,
> Thy righteous law approves it well."

That soul is not far from peace which has ceased arguing and submits to the sentence. Oh, sinner, I urge thee, if thou wouldst find speedy rest, go and throw thyself at the foot of the cross where God meets such as thou art, and say, "Lord, here I am; do what thou wilt with me. Never a word of excuse will I offer, nor one single plea by way of extenuation. I am a mass of guilt and misery, but pity me, oh, pity me! No rights or claims have I; I have forfeited the rights of creatureship by becoming a rebel against thee. I am lost and utterly undone before the bar of thy justice. From that justice I flee and hide myself in the wounds of thy Son. According to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!"

Once again, here was such a yielding up of himself to his father that no terms or conditions are mentioned or implied. He begs to be received, but a servant's place is good enough for him; amongst the scullions of the kitchen he is content to take his place, so long as he may be forgiven. He does not ask for a little liberty to sin, or stipulate for a little self-righteousness wherein he may boast; he gives all up. He is willing to be anything or nothing, just as his father pleases, so that he may but be numbered with his household. No weapons of rebellion are in his hands now. No secret opposition to his father's rule lingers in his soul, he is completely subdued, and lies at his father's feet. Our Lord never crushed a soul yet that lay prostrate at his feet, and he never will. He will stoop down and say, "Rise, my child; rise, for I have forgiven thee. Go and sin no more. I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Come and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

IV. Notice further, and fourthly, that IN THIS ACT THERE WAS A MEASURE OF FAITH IN HIS FATHER—a measure, I say, meaning thereby not much faith, but some. A little faith saves the soul. There was faith in his father's power. He said, "In my father's house there is bread enough and to spare." Sinner, dost thou not believe that God is able to save thee; that through Jesus Christ he is able to supply thy soul's needs. Canst thou not get as far as this, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." The prodigal had also some faith in his father's readiness to pardon; for if he had not so hoped, he would never have returned to his father at all: if he had been sure that his father would never smile upon him he would never have returned to him. Sinner, do believe that God is merciful, for so he is. Believe, through Jesus Christ, that he willeth not the death of the sinner, but had rather that he should turn to him and live; for as

surely as God liveth, this is truth, and do not thou believe a lie concerning thy God. The Lord is not hard or harsh, but he rejoices to pardon great transgressions. The prodigal also believed in his father's readiness to bless him. He felt sure that his father would go as far as propriety would permit, for he said, "I am not worthy to be called thy son, but make me at least thy servant." In this also he admitted that his father was so good, that even to be his servant would be a great matter. He was contented even to get the lowest place, so long as he might be under the shade of so good a protector

Ah, poor sinner, dost thou not believe that God will have mercy on thee if he can do so consistently with his justice? If thou believest that, I have good news to tell thee. Jesus Christ, his Son, has offered such an atonement, that God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth; he has mercy upon the vilest, and justifieth the ungodly, and accepteth the very chief of sinners through his dear Son. Oh, soul, have faith in the atonement. The atonement made by the personal sacrifice of the Son of God must be infinitely precious; believe thou that there is efficacy enough in it for thee. It is thy safety to fly to that atonement and cling to the Cross of Christ, and thou wilt honour God by so doing; is the only way in which thou canst honour him. Thou canst honour him by believing that he can save thee, even thee. The truest faith is that which believes in the mercy of God in the teeth of conscious unworthiness. The penitent in the parable went to his father too unworthy to be called his son, and yet he said, "My father." Faith has a way of seeing the blackness of sin, and yet believing that God can make the soul as white as snow. It is not faith that says, "I am a little sinner, and therefore God can forgive me;" but that is faith which cries, "I am a great sinner, an accursed and condemned sinner, and yet, for all that, God's infinite mercy can forgive me, and the blood of Christ can make me clean." Believe in the teeth of thy feelings, and in spite of thy conscience; believe in God, though everything within thee seems to say, "He cannot save thee; he will not save thee." Believe in God, sinner, over the tops of mountain sins. Do as John Bunyan says he did, for he was so afraid of his sins and of the punishment thereof, that he could not but run into God's arms, and he said, "Though he had held a drawn sword in his hands, I would have run on the very point of it, rather than have kept away from him." So do thou, poor sinner. Believe thy God. Believe in nothing else, but trust thy God, and thou wilt get the blessing. It is wonderful the power of faith over God, it binds his justice and constrains his grace. I do not know how to illustrate it better than by a little story. When I walked down my garden some time ago I found a dog amusing himself among the flowers. I knew that he was not a good gardener, and no dog of mine, so I threw a stick at him and bade him begone. After I had done so, he conquered me, and made me ashamed of having spoken roughly to him, for he picked up my stick, and, wagging his tail right pleasantly, he brought the stick to me, and dropped it at my feet. Do you think I could strike him or drive him away after that? No, I patted him and called him good names. The dog had conquered the man. And if you, poor sinner, dog as you are, can have confidence

enough in God to come to him just as you are, it is not in his heart to spurn you. There is an omnipotence in simple faith which will conquer even the divine Being himself. Only do but trust him as he reveals himself in Jesus, and you shall find salvation.

V. I have not time or strength to dwell longer here, and so I must notice, fifthly, that THIS ACT OF COMING INTO CONTACT WITH GOD IS PERFORMED BY THE SINNER JUST AS HE IS. I do not know how wretched the prodigal's appearance may have been, but I will be bound to say he had grown none the sweeter by having fed swine, nor do I suppose his garments had been very sumptuously embroidered by gathering husks for them from the trees. Yet, just as he was, he came. Surely he might have spent an hour profitably in cleansing his flesh and his clothes. But no, he said, "I will arise," and no sooner said than done! he did arise, and he came to his father. Every moment that a sinner stops away from God in order to get better he is but adding to his sin, for the radical sin of all is his being away from God and the longer he stays in it the more he sins. The attempt to perform good works apart from God is like the effort of a thief to set his stolen goods in order, his sole duty is to return them at once. The very same pride which leads men away from God may be seen in their self-conceited notion that they can improve themselves while still they refuse to return to him. The essence of their fault is that they are far off from God, and whatever they do, so long as that distance remains, nothing is effectually done. I say the radical of the whole matter is distance from God, and therefore the commencement of setting matters right lies in arising and returning to him from whom they have departed.

The prodigal was bound to go home just as he was, for there was nothing that he could do. He was reduced to such extremities that he could not purchase a fresh piece of cloth to mend his garments, nor a farthing's worth of soap with which to cleanse his flesh; and it is a great mercy when a man is so spiritually reduced that he cannot do anything but go to his God as a beggar, when he is so bankrupt that he cannot pay a farthing in the pound, when he is so lost that he cannot even repent or believe apart from God, but feels that he is for ever undone unless the Lord shall interpose. It is our wisdom to go to God for everything.

Moreover, there was nothing needed from the prodigal but to return to his father. When a child who has done wrong comes back, the more its face is blurred with tears the better. When a beggar asks for charity, the more his clothes are in rags the better. Are not rags and sores the very livery of beggars? I once gave a man a pair of shoes because he said he was in need of them; but after he had put them on and gone a little way I overtook him in a gateway taking them off in order to go barefooted again. I think they were patent leather, and what should a beggar do in such attire? He was changing them for "old shoes and clouted," those were suitable to his business. A sinner is never so well arrayed for pleading as when he comes in rags. At his worst, the sinner, for making an appeal to mercy, is at his best. And so, sinners, there is no need for you to linger; come just as you are. "But must we not wait for the Holy Spirit?" Ah, beloved, he

who is willing to arise and go to his Father has the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who moves us to return to God, and it is the spirit of the flesh or of the devil that would bid us wait.

How now, sinners? Some of you are sitting in those pews; where are you? I cannot find you out, but my Master can, he has made this sermon on purpose for you. "Well, but I would like to get home and pray." Pray where you are, in the pew. "But I cannot speak out aloud." You may if you like, I won't stop you. "But I should not like." Well, don't, then. God can hear you without a sound, though I wish sometimes we did hear people cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" I would gladly hear the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But if men cannot hear you, the Lord can hear the cries of their hearts. Now, just sit still a minute, and say, "My God I must come to thee. Thou art in Jesus Christ, and in him thou has already come a great way to meet me. My soul wants thee; take me now, and make me what I ought to be. Forgive me, and accept me." It is the turning-point of a man's life when that is done, wherever it is, whether in a workshop, or in a saw-pit, in a church, or in a tabernacle; it does not matter where. There is the point—the getting to God in Christ, giving all up, and by faith resting in the mercy of God.

VI. The last point of all is this—THAT ACT WROUGHT THE GREATEST CONCEIVABLE CHANGE IN THE MAN. He was a new man after that. Harlots, winebibbers, you have lost your old companion now! He has gone to his Father, and his Father's company and yours will never agree. A man's return to his God means his leaving the chambers of vice and the tables of riot. You may depend upon it whenever you hear of a professing Christian living in uncleanness, he has not been living anywhere near his God. He may have talked a great deal about it, but God and unchastity never agree; if you have friendship with God you will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

Now, too, the penitent has done with all degrading works to support himself. You will not find him feeding swine any more, or making a swine of himself either by trusting in priests or sacraments; he will not confess to a priest again, or pay a penny to get his mother out of purgatory; he is not such a fool as that any more. He has been to his God on his own account, and he does not want any of these shavelings to go to God for him. He has got away from that bondage. No more pig-feeding; no more superstition for him! "Why," says he, "I have access with boldness to the mercy-seat, and what have I to do with the priests of Rome?"

There is a change in him in all ways. Now he has come to his father his pride is broken down. He no longer glories in that which he calls his own; all his glory is in his father's free pardoning love. He never boasts of what he has, for he owns that he has nothing but what his father gives him; and though he is far better off than ever he was in his spendthrift days, yet he is as unassuming as a little child. He is a gentleman-commoner upon the bounty of his God, and lives from day to day by a royal grant from the table of the King of kings. Pride is gone, but content fills its room. He would have been contented to be one of the servants of the house, much more satisfied is he

to be a child. He loves his father with a new love; he cannot even mention his name without saying, "And he forgave me, he forgave me freely, he forgave me all, and he said, 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.'" From the day of his restoration the prodigal is bound to his Father's home, and reckons it to be one of his greatest blessings that it is written in the covenant of grace, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

This morning I believe that God in his mercy means to call many sinners to himself. I am often very much surprised to find how the Lord guides my word according to the persons before me. Last Sunday there came here a young son of a gentleman, a foreigner, from a distant land, under considerable impressions as to the truth of the Christian religion. His father is a follower of one of the ancient religions of the East, and this young gentleman naturally felt it a great difficulty that he would probably make his father angry if he became a Christian. Judge, then, how closely the message of last Sabbath came home to him, when the text was, "What if thy father answer thee roughly?" He came to tell me that he thanked God for that message, and he hoped to bear up under the trial, should persecution arise. I feel that I am with equal plainness speaking to some of you. I know I am. You are saying, "May I now go to God just as I am, and through Jesus Christ yield myself up; and will he forgive me?" Dear brother, or dear sister, wherever you may be, *try it.* That is the best thing to do: *try it;* and, if the angels do not set the bells in heaven ringing, God has altered from what he was last week, for I know he received poor sinners then, and he will receive them now. The worst thing I dread about you is, lest you should say, "I will think of it." *Don't* think of it. *Do it!* Concerning this no more thinking is needed; but to do it. Get away to God. Is it not according to nature that the creature should be at peace with its Creator? Is it not according to your conscience? Is there not something within you which cries, "Go to God in Christ Jesus." In the case of that poor prodigal, the famine said to him, "Go home!" Bread was dear, meat was scarce, he was hungry, and every pang of want said, "Go home! Go home!" When he went to his old friend the citizen, and he asked him for help, his scowling looks said, "Why don't you go home?" There is a time with sinners when even their old companions seem to say, "We do not want you. You are too miserable and melancholy. Why don't you go home?" They sent him to feed swine, and the very hogs grunted, "Go home?" When he picked up those carob husks and tried to eat them, they crackled, "Go home." He looked upon his rags, and they gaped at him, "*Go home.*" His hungry belly and his faintness cried, "*Go home.*" Then he thought of his father's face, and how kindly it had looked at him, and it seemed to say, "Come home!" He remembered the bread enough and to spare, and every morsel seemed to say, "Come home!" He pictured the servants sitting down to dinner and feasting to the full, and every one of them seemed to look right away over the wilderness to him and to say, "Come home! Thy father feeds us well. Come home!" Everything said, "Come home!" Only the devil whispered, "Never go back. Fight

it out! Better starve than yield! Die game!" But then he had got away from the devil this once, for he had come to himself, and he said, "No; I will arise and go to my father." Oh that you would be equally wise. Sinner, what is the use of being damned for the sake of a little pride. Yield thee, man! Down with thy pride! You will not find it so hard to submit if you remember that dear Father who loved us and gave himself for us in the person of his own dear Son. You will find it sweet to yield to such a friend. And when you get your head in his bosom, and feel his warm kisses on your cheek, you will soon feel that it is sweet to weep for sin—sweet to confess your wrong doing, and sweeter still to hear him say, "I have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thy transgressions." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

God Almighty grant this may be the case with hundreds of you this morning. He shall have all the glory of it, but my heart shall be very glad, for I feel nothing of the spirit of the elder brother within me, but the greatest conceivable joy at the thought of making merry with you by-and-by, when you come to own my Lord and Master, and we sit together at the sacramental feast, rejoicing in his love. God bless you, for his sake. Amen.

The Prodigal's Return

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him"—Luke xv. 20.

ALL persons engaged in education will tell you that they find it far more difficult to make the mind unlearn its errors than to make it receive truth. If we could suppose a man totally ignorant of anything, we should have a fairer chance of instructing him quickly and effectually than we should have had if his mind had been previously stored with falsehood. I have no doubt you, each of you, find it harder to unlearn than to learn. To get rid of old prejudices and preconceived notions is a very hard struggle indeed. It has been well said, that those few words, "I am mistaken," are the hardest in all the English language to pronounce, and certainly it takes very much force to compel us to pronounce them: and after having done so, it is even then difficult to wipe away the slime which an old serpentine error has left upon the heart. Better for us not to have known at all than to have known the wrong thing. Now, I am sure that this truth is never more true than when it applies to God. If I had been let alone to form my notion of God, entirely from Holy Scripture, I feel, that with the assistance of his Holy Spirit it would have been far more easy for me to understand what he is, and how he governs the world, than to learn even the truths of his own Word, after the mind had become perverted by the opinions of others. Why, brethren, who is it that gives a fair representation of God? The Arminian slanders God by accusing him (not in his own intention, but really so) of unfaithfulness; for he teaches that God may promise what he never performs; that he may give eternal life, and promise that those who have it shall never perish, and yet they may perish after all. He speaks of God as if he was a mutable being, for he talks of his loving men one day, and hating them the next; of his writing their names in the Book of Life one hour, and then erasing their names in the next. And the influence of such an error as that, is very baneful. Many children of God, who have imbibed these errors in early youth, have had to drag along their poor wearied and broken frames for many a day, whereas they might have walked joyfully to heaven if they had known the truth from the beginning. On the other hand, those who hear the Calvinistic preacher, are very apt to misinterpret God. Although we trust we would never speak of God in any other sense than that in which we find him represented in sacred Scripture, yet are we well aware that many of our hearers, even through our assertions, when most guarded, are apt to get rather a caricature of God, than a true picture of him. They imagine that God is a severe being, angry and fierce, very easily to be moved to wrath, but not so easily to be induced to love; they are apt to think of him as one who sits in supreme and lofty state, either totally indifferent to the wishes of his creatures, or else determined to have his own way with them, as an arbitrary Sovereign, never listening to their desires, or compassionating their woes. Oh that we could unlearn all these fallacies, and believe God to be what he is! Oh that we could come to Scripture, and there look into

that glass which reflects his sacred image, and then receive him as he is, the all-Wise, the all-Just, and yet the all-Gracious, and all-Loving Jehovah! I shall endeavour this morning, by the help of God's Holy Spirit, to represent the lovely character of Christ; and if I shall be happy enough to have some in my audience who are in the position of the prodigal son in the parable—coming to Christ, and yet a great way off from him—I shall trust that they will be led by the same Divine Spirit, to believe in the lovingkindness of Jehovah, and so may find peace with God now, ere they leave this house of prayer.

"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." First, I shall notice the *position* intended in the words, "a great way off;" secondly, I shall notice the *peculiar troubles* which agitate the minds of those, who are in this condition; and then, thirdly. I shall endeavour to teach *the great lovingkindness of our own adorable God*, inasmuch as when we are "a great way off," he runs to us, and embraces us in the arms of his love.

I. First, then, what is the POSITION signified by being "a great way off?" I must just notice what is *not* that position. It is not the position of the man who is careless and entirely regardless of God; for you notice that the prodigal is represented now as having come to himself, and as returning to his father's house. Though it be true that all sinners are a great way off from God, whether they know it or not, yet in this particular instance, the position of the poor prodigal is intended to signify the character of one, who has been aroused by conviction, who has been led to abhor his former life, and who sincerely desires to return to God. I shall not, then, this morning, specially address the blasphemer, and the profane. To him, there may be some incidental warning heard, but I shall not specially address such a character. It is another person for whom this text is intended: the man who has been a blasphemer, if you please, who may have been a drunkard, and a swearer, and what not, but who has now renounced these things, and is steadfastly seeking after Christ, that he may obtain eternal life. That is the man who is here said to be, though coming to the Lord, "a great way off."

Once again, there is another person who is not intended by this description, namely, the very great man, the Pharisee who thinks himself extremely righteous, and has never learned to confess his sin. You, sir, in your apprehension, are not a great way off. You are so really in the sight of God; you are as far from him as light from darkness, as the east is from the west; but you are not spoken of here. You are like the prodigal son, only that instead of spending your life righteously, you have run away from your Father, and hidden in the earth the gold which he gave you, and are able to feed upon the husks which swine do eat, whilst by a miserable economy of good works you are hoping to save enough of your fortune to support yourself here and in eternity. Your hope of self-salvation is a fallacy, and you are not addressed in the words of the text. It is the man who knows himself lost, but desires to be saved, who is here declared to be met by God, and received with affectionate embraces.

And now we come to the question, Who is the man, and why is he said to be a great way off? For he seems to be very near the kingdom, now that he knows his need and is seeking the Saviour. I reply, in the first place, he is a great way off in his own apprehensions. You are here this morning, and you have an idea that never was man so far from God as you are. You look back upon your past life, and you recollect how you have slighted God, despised his Sabbath, neglected his Book, trampled upon the blood of sprinkling, and rejected all the invitations of his mercy. You turn over the pages of your history, and you remember the sins which you have committed—the sins of your youth and your former transgressions, the crimes of your manhood, and the riper sins of your older years like black waves dashing upon a dark shore, they roll in wave upon wave, upon your poor troubled memory. There comes a little wave of your childish folly, and over that there leaps one of your youthful transgressions, and over the head of this there comes a very Atlantic billow of your manhood's transgressions. At the sight of them you stand astonished and amazed. "O Lord my God, how deep is the gulf which divides me from thyself, and where is the power that can bridge it? I am separated from thee by leagues of sin, whole mountains of my guilt are piled upwards between me and thyself. O God, shouldest thou destroy me now, thou wouldest be just; and if thou dost ever bring me to thyself, it must be nothing less than a power as Omnipotent as that which made the world, which can ever do it.

Oh! how far am I from God!" Some of you would be startled this morning, if your neighbours were to give you revelations of their own feelings. If yonder man standing there in the crowd could come into this pulpit, and tell out what he now feels, you might perhaps be horrified at his description of his own heart. How many of you have no notion of the way in which a soul is cut and hacked about, when it is under the convictions of the law! If you should hear the man tell out what he feels, you would say, "Ah! he is a poor deluded enthusiast; men are not so bad as that;" or else you would be apt to think he had committed some nameless crime which he dare not mention, that was preying on his conscience. Nay, sir, he has been as moral and as upright as you have been; but should he describe himself as he now discovers himself to be, he would shock you utterly. And yet you are the same, though you feel it not, and would indignantly deny it. When the light of God's grace comes into your heart, it is something like the opening of the windows of an old cellar that has been shut up for many days. Down in that cellar, which has not been opened for many months, are all kinds of loathsome creatures, and a few sickly plants blanched by the darkness. The walls are dark and damp with the trail of reptiles; it is a horrid filthy place in which no one would willingly enter. You may walk there in the dark very securely, and except now and then for the touch of some slimy creature, you would not believe the place was so bad and filthy. Open those shutters, clean a pane of glass, let a little light in, and now see how a thousand noxious things have made this place their habitation. Sure, 'twas not the light that made this place so horrible, but it was the light that showed how horrible it was before. So let God's grace just open a window and let the light into a man's soul, and he will stand astonished to see at what a distance he is from God. Yes, sir, to-day you think yourself second to none but the Eternal; you fancy that you can approach his throne with steady step; it is but a little that you have to do to be saved; you imagine that you can accomplish it at any hour, and save yourself upon your dying bed as well as now. Ah! sir, if you could but be touched by Ithuriel's wand, and made to be in appearance what you are in reality, then you would see that you are far enough from God even now, and so far from him, that unless the arms of his grace were stretched out to bring you to himself, you must perish in your sin. Now I turn my eye again with hope, and trust I have not a few in this large assembly, who can say, "Sir, I feel I am far from God, and sometimes I fear I am so far from him, that he will never have mercy upon me; I dare not lift so much as my eyes towards heaven; I smite on my breast, and say, 'Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner.'" Oh! poor heart; here is a comforting passage for thee: "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him."

But again, there is a second sense in which some now present feel themselves to be far off from God. Conscience tells every man that if he would be saved he must get rid of his sin. The Antinomian may possibly pretend to believe that men can be saved while they live in sin; but conscience will never allow any man to swallow so egregious a lie as that. I have not one person in this congregation who is not perfectly assured that if he is to be saved he must leave off his drunkenness and his vices. Sure there is not one here so stupified with the laudanum of hellish indifference as to imagine that he can revel in his lusts, and afterwards wear the white robe of the redeemed in Paradise. If ye imagine ye can be partakers of the blood of Christ, and yet drink the cup of Belial; if ye imagine that ye can be members of Satan and members of Christ at the same time, ye have less sense than one would give you credit for. No, you know that right arms must be cut off, and right eyes plucked out—that the most darling sins must be renounced, if ye would enter into the kingdom of God. And I have a man here who is convinced of the unholiness of his life, and he has striven to reform, not because he thinks reformation would save him, for he knows better than that, but because he knows that this is one of the first fruits of grace—reformation from sin. Well, poor man, he has for many years been an inveterate drunkard, and he struggles now to overcome the passion. He has almost effected it; but he never had such an Herculean labour to attempt before; for now some temptation comes upon him so strongly, that it is as much as he can do to stand against it; and perhaps sometimes since his first conviction of sin he has even fallen into it. Or perhaps it is another vice, and you, my brother, have set your face against it; but there are many bonds and fetters that bind us to our vices, and you find that though it was

easy enough to spin the warp and woof of sin together; it is not so easy to unravel that which you have spun. You cannot purge your house of your idols; you do not yet know how to give up all your lustful pleasures. Not yet can you renounce the company of the ungodly. You have cut off one by one your most intimate acquaintances, but it is very hard to do it completely, and you are struggling to accomplish it, and you often fall on your knees and cry, "O Lord, how far I am from thee! what high steps these are which I have to climb! Oh! how can I be saved? Sure, if I cannot purge myself from my old sins, I shall never be able to hold on my way; and even should I get rid of them, I should plunge into them once more." You are crying out, "Oh, how great my distance from God! Lord, bring me near!"

Let me present you with one other aspect of our distance from God. You have read your Bibles, and you believe that faith alone can unite the soul to Christ. You feel that unless you can believe in him who died upon the cross for your sins, you can never see the kingdom of God; but you can say this morning, "Sir, I have striven to believe; I have searched the Scriptures, not hours, but days together, to find a promise upon which my weary foot might rest; I have been upon my knees many and many a time, earnestly supplicating a divine blessing; but though I have pleaded, all in vain have I urged my plea, for until now no whisper have I had of grace, no token for good, no sign of mercy. Sir, I have striven to believe, and I have said,

> 'O could I but believe!
> Then all would easy be;
> I would, but cannot—Lord, relieve,
> My help must come from thee!'

I have used all the power I have, and have desperately striven to cast myself at the Saviour's feet and see my sins washed away in his blood. I have not been indifferent to the story of the cross; I have read it a hundred times, and even wept over it; but when I strive to put my hand upon the scape-goat's head, and labour to believe that my sins are transferred to him, some demon seems to stop the breath that would breathe itself forth in adoration, and something checks the hand that would lay itself upon the head that died for me." Well, poor soul, thou art indeed far from God. I will repeat the words of the text to thee. May the Holy Spirit repeat them in thine ear! "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." So shall it be with thee if thou hast come thus far, though great may be the distance, thy feet shall not have to travel it, but God the Eternal One shall from his throne look down and visit thy poor heart, though now thou tarriest by the way afraid to approach him.

II. Our second point is the PECULIAR TROUBLES which agitate the breasts of those who are in this position. Let us introduce to you the poor ragged prodigal. After a life of ease, he is by his own vice plunged into penury and labour. After feeding swine for a time, and being almost starved, he sets about returning to his father's house. It is a long and weary journey. He walks many a mile until his feet are sore, and at last from the summit of a mountain he views his father's house far away in the plain. There are yet many miles between him and his father whom he has neglected. Can you conceive his emotions when for the first time after so long an absence he sees the old house at home? He remembers it well in the distance; for though it is long since he trod its floors he has never ceased to recollect it; and the remembrance of his father's kindness, and of his own prosperity when he was with him, has never yet been erased from his consciousness. You would imagine that for one moment he feels a flash of joy, like some flash of lightning in the midst of the tempest, but anon a black darkness comes over his spirit. In the first place, it is probable he will think, "Oh! suppose I could reach my home, will my father receive me? Will he not shut the door in my face and tell me to begone and spend the rest of my life where I have been spending the first of it?" Then another suggestion might arise: "Surely, the demon that led me first astray may lead me back again, before I salute my parent." "Or mayhap," thought he, "I may even die upon the road, and so before I have received my father's blessing my soul may stand before its God." I doubt not each of these three thoughts has

crossed your mind if you are now in the position of one who is seeking Christ, but mourns to feel himself far away from him.

First, you have been afraid lest you should die before Christ has appeared to you. You have been for months seeking the Saviour without finding him, and now the black thought comes, "And what if I should die with all these prayers unanswered? Oh! if he would but hear me ere I departed this world I would be content, though he should keep me waiting in anguish for many years. But what, if before to-morrow morning I should be a corpse? At my bed I kneel to-night and cry for mercy. Oh! if he should not send the pardon before to-morrow morning, and in the night my spirit should stand before his bar!—What then?" It is singular that other men think they shall live for ever, but men convinced of sin, who seek a Saviour, are afraid they shall not live another moment. You have known the time, dear Christian brethren, when you dared not shut your eyes for fear you should not open them again on earth; when you dreaded the shadows of the night lest they should darken for ever the light of the sun, and you should dwell in outer darkness throughout eternity. You have mourned as each day has entered, and you have wept as it has departed, because you fancied that your next step might precipitate you into your eternal doom. I have known what it is to tread the earth and fear lest every tuft of grass should but cover a door to hell; trembling, lest every particle, and every atom, and every stone, should be so at league with God against me, as to destroy me. John Bunyan says, that at one time in his experience, he felt that he had rather have been born a dog or a toad than a man; he felt so unutterably wretched on account of sin; and his great point of wretchedness was the fact, that though he had been three years seeking Christ, he might after all die without finding him. And in truth, this is no needless alarm. It may be perhaps too alarming to some who already feel their need of Christ, but the mass of us need perpetually to be startled with the thought of death. How few of you ever indulge that thought! Because ye live and are in health, and eat, and drink, and sleep, ye think ye shall not die. Do ye ever soberly look at your last end? Do ye ever, when ye come to your beds at night, think how one day ye shall undress for the last slumber? And when ye wake in the morning, do ye never think that the trump of the archangel shall startle you to appear before God in the last day of the great assize, wherein an universe shall stand before the Judge? No. "All men think all men mortal but themselves;" and thoughts of death we still push off, until at last we shall find ourselves waking up in torment, where to wake is to wake too late. But thou to whom I specially speak this morning, thou who feelest that thou art a great way off from Christ, thou shalt never die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord; if thou hast really sought him, thou shalt never die until thou hast found him. There was never a soul yet, that sincerely sought the Saviour, who perished before he found him. No; the gates of death shall never shut on thee till the gates of grace have opened for thee; till Christ has washed thy sins away thou shalt never be baptized in Jordan's flood. Thy life is secure, for this is God's constant plan—he keeps his own elect alive till the day of his grace, and then he takes them to himself. And inasmuch as thou knowest thy need of a Saviour, thou art one of his, and thou shalt never die until thou hast found him.

Your second fear is, "Ah, sir! I am not afraid of dying before I find Christ, I have a worse fear than that; I have had convictions before, and they have often passed away; my greatest fear to-day is, that these will be the same." I have heard of a poor collier, who on one occasion, having been deeply impressed under a sermon, was led to repent of sin and forsake his former life; but he felt so great a horror of ever returning to his former conversation, that one day he knelt down and cried thus unto God, "O Lord, let me die on this spot, rather than ever deny the religion which I have espoused, and turn back to my former conversation:" and we are credibly told, that he died on that very spot, and so his prayer was answered. God had rather take him home to heaven than suffer him to bear the brunt of temptation on earth. Now, when men come to Christ, they feel that they had rather suffer anything than lose their convictions. Scores of times have you and I been drawn to Christ under the preaching of the Word. We can look back upon dozens of occasions on which it seemed just the turning point with us. Something said in our hearts, "Now, believe in Christ, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." But we said, "To-morrow, to-morrow;" and when to-morrow came our convictions were gone. We thought what we said yesterday would be the deed of to-day; but instead of it, the

procrastination of yesterday became the hardened wickedness of to-day: we wandered farther from God and forgot him. Now you are crying to him for fear, lest he should give you up again. You have this morning prayed before you came here, and you said, "Father, suffer not my companions to laugh me out of my religion; let not my worldly business so engross my thoughts, as to prevent my due attention to the matters of another world. Oh, let not the trifles of to-day so absorb my thoughts that I may not be preparing myself to meet my God—

'Deeply on my thoughtful heart,
Eternal things impress'

and make this a real saving work that shall never die out, nor be taken from me.' Is that your earnest prayer? O poor prodigal, it shall be heard, it shall be answered. Thou shalt not have time to go back. To-day thy Father views thee from his throne in heaven; to-day he runs to thee in the message of his gospel; to-day he falls upon thy neck and weeps for joy; to-day he says to thee, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven;" to-day, by the preaching of the Word, he bids thee come and reason with him, "for though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool, though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow."

But the last and the most prominent thought which I suppose the prodigal would have, would be, that when he did get to his father, he would say to him, "Get along with you, I will have nothing more to do with you." "Ah!" thought he to himself, "I recollect the morning when I rose up before day-break, because I knew I could not stand my mother's tears; I remember how I crept down the back staircase and took all the money with me, how I stole down the yard and ran away into the land where I spent my all. Oh! what will the old gentleman say of me when I come back? Why, there he is! He is running to me. But he has got a horsewhip with him, to be sure, to whip me away. It is not at all possible that if he comes he will have a kind word for me. The most I can expect is that he will say, 'Well John, you have wasted all your money, you cannot expect me to do anything for you again. I won't let you starve; you shall be one of my servants; there, come, I will take you as footman;' and if he will do that I will be obliged to him; nay, that is the very thing I will ask of him; I will say, 'Make me as one of thy hired servants.'" "Oh," said the devil within him, "your father will never speak comfortably to you: you had better run away again. I tell you if he gets near you, you will have such a dressing as you never received in your life. You will die with a broken heart; you will very likely fall dead here; the old man will never bury you; the carrion crows will eat you. There is no hope for you: see how you have treated him. Put yourself in his place: what would you do if you had a son that had run away with half your living, and spent it upon harlots?" And the son thought if he were in his father's place he should be very harsh and severe; and possibly, he almost turned upon his heel to run away. But he had not time to do that. When he was just thinking about running away, on a sudden his father's arms were about his neck, and he had received the paternal kiss. Nay, before he could get his whole prayer finished, he was arrayed in a white robe, the best in the house; and they had brought him to the table, and the fatted calf was being killed for his repast. And poor soul, it shall be so with you. Thou sayest, "If I go to God, he will never receive me. I am too vile and wretched: others he may have pressed to his heart, but he will not me. If my brother should go, he might be saved; but there are such aggravations in my crime; I have grown so old since; I have done such a deal of mischief; I have so often blasphemed him, so frequently broken his Sabbaths; ah! and I have so often deceived him; I have promised I would repent, and when I have got well I have lied to God, and gone back to my old sin. Oh, if he would but let me creep inside the door of heaven! I will not ask to be one of his children; I will only ask that he will let me be where the Syro-Phœnician woman desired to be—to be a dog, to eat the crumbs that fall from the Master's table. That is all I ask; and oh! if he will but grant it to me, he shall never hear the last of it, for as long as I live I will sing his praise; and when the world doth fade away, and the sun grow dim with age, my gratitude, immortal as my soul, shall never cease to sing his love, who pardoned my grossest sins and washed me in his blood." It shall be so. Come and try. Now, sinners, dry your tears; let hopeless sorrows cease; look to the wounds of Christ, who died; let all your griefs now be

removed, there is no further cause for them: your Father loves you; he accepts and receives you to his heart.

III. Now, in conclusion, I may notice HOW THESE FEARS WERE MET IN THE PRODIGAL'S CASE, and how they shall be met in ours if we are in the same condition.

The text says, "The Father saw him" Yes, and God saw thee just now. That tear which was wiped away so hastily—as if thou wast ashamed of it—God saw it, and he stored it in his bottle. That prayer which thou didst breathe just a few moments ago, so faintly, and with such little faith—God heard it. The other day thou wast in thy chamber, where no ear heard thee; but God was there. Sinner, let this be thy comfort, that God sees thee when thou beginnest to repent. He does not see thee with his usual gaze, with which he looks on all men; but he sees thee with an eye of intense interest. He has been looking on thee in all thy sin, and in all thy sorrow, hoping that thou wouldst repent; and now he sees the first gleam of grace, and he beholds it with joy. Never warder on the lonely castle top saw the first grey light of morning with more joy than that with which God beholds the first desire in thy heart. Never physician rejoiced more when he saw the first heaving of the lungs in one that was supposed to be dead, than God doth rejoice over thee, now that he sees the first token for good. Think not that thou art despised, and unknown, and forgotten. He is marking thee from his high throne in glory, and rejoicing in what he sees. He saw thee pray, he heard thee groan, he marked thy tear; he looked upon thee and rejoiced to see that these were the first seeds of grace in thine heart.

And then, the text says, "he had compassion on him." He did not merely see him, but he wept within himself to think he should be in such a condition. The old father had a very long range of eye-sight; and though the prodigal could not see him in the distance, he could see the prodigal. And the father's first thought when he saw him was this—"O my poor son, O my poor boy! that ever he should have brought himself into such a state as this!" He looked through his telescope of love, and he saw him, and said, "Ah! he did not go out of my house in such trim as that. Poor creature, his feet are bleeding; he has come a long way, I'll be bound. Look at his face; he doesn't look like the same boy that he was when he left me. His eye that was so bright, is now sunken in its socket; his cheeks that once stood out with fatness, have now become hollow with famine. Poor wretch, I can tell all his bones, he is so emaciated." Instead of feeling any anger in his heart, he felt just the contrary; he felt such pity for his poor son. And that is how the Lord feels for you—you that are groaning and moaning on account of sin. He forgets your sins; he only weeps to think you should have brought yourself to be what you are: "Why didst thou rebel against me, and bring thyself into such a state as this?" It was just like that day when Adam sinned. God walked in the garden, and he missed Adam. He did not cry out, "Adam, come here and be judged!" No; with a soft, sorrowful, and plaintive voice, he said, "Adam, where art thou? Oh, my fair Adam, thou whom I made so happy, where art thou now? Oh, Adam! thou didst think to become a God; where art thou now? Thou hast walked with me; dost thou hide thyself from thy friend? Little dost thou know Oh Adam, what woes thou hast brought on thyself, and thine offspring. Adam, where art thou?" And Jehovah's bowels yearn to-day over you. He is not angry with you; his anger is passed away, and his hands are stretched out still. Inasmuch as he has brought you to feel that you have sinned against him, and to desire reconciliation with him, there is now no wrath in his heart. The only sorrow that he feels is sorrow that you should have brought yourself into a state so mournful as that in which you now are found.

But he did not stop in mere compassion. Having had compassion, "he ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." This you do not understand yet; but you shall. As sure as God is God, if you this day are seeking him aright through Christ, the day shall come when the kiss of full assurance shall be on your lip, when the arms of sovereign love shall embrace you, and you shall know it to be so. Thou mayest have despised him, but thou shalt know him yet to be thy Father and thy Friend. Thou mayest have scoffed his name; thou shalt one day come to rejoice in it as better than pure gold. Thou mayest have broken his Sabbaths and despised his Word; the day is coming when the Sabbath shall be thy delight, and his Word thy treasure. Yes, marvel not; thou mayest have plunged into the kennel of sin and made thy clothes black with iniquity; but thou shalt one day

stand before his throne white as the angels be; and that tongue that once cursed him shall yet sing his praise. If thou be a real seeker, the hands that have been stained with lust shall one day grasp the harp of gold, and the head that has plotted against the Most High shall yet be girt with gold. Seemeth it not a strange thing that God should do so much for sinners? But strange though it seem, it shall be strangely true. Look at the staggering drunkard in the ale-house. Is there a possibility that one day he shall stand amongst the fairest sons of light? Possibility! ay, certainty, if he repents and turns from the error of his ways. Hear you yon curser and swearer? See you the man who labels himself as a servant of hell, and is not ashamed to do so? Is it possible that he shall one day share the bliss of the redeemed? Possible! ay, more, it is sure, if he turneth from his evil ways. O sovereign grace, turn men that they may repent! "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

"Lord do thou the sinner turn,
For thy tender mercies sake!"

One word or so, and I have done. If any of you to-day are under conviction of sin, let me solemnly warn you not to frequent places where those convictions are likely to be destroyed.

A correspondent of the *New York Christian Advocate* furnishes the following affecting narrative:—

"When I was travelling in the state of Massachusetts, twenty-six years ago, after preaching one evening in the town of ————, a very serious-looking young man arose, and wished to address the assembly. After obtaining leave, he spoke as follows:—'My friends, about one year ago, I set out in company with a young man of my intimate acquaintance, to seek the salvation of my soul. For several weeks we went on together, we laboured together, and often renewed our covenant never to give over seeking till we obtained the religion of Jesus. But, all at once, the young man neglected attending meeting, appeared to turn his back on all the means of grace, and grew so shy of me, that I could scarcely get an opportunity to speak with him. His strange conduct gave me much painful anxiety of mind; but still I felt resolved to obtain the salvation of my soul, or perish, making the publican's plea. After a few days, a friend informed me that my young companion had received an invitation to attend a ball, and was determined to go. I went immediately to him, and, with tears in my eyes, endeavoured to persuade him to change his purpose, and to go with me on that evening to a prayer-meeting. I pleaded with him in vain. He told me, when we parted, that I must not give him up as lost, for after he had attended that ball, he intended to make a business of seeking religion. The appointed evening came, and he went to the ball, and I went to the prayer-meeting. Soon after the meeting opened, it pleased God, in answer to my prayer, to turn my captivity, and make my soul rejoice in his justifying love. Soon after the ball opened, my young friend was standing at the head of the ball-room, with the hand of a young lady in his hand, preparing to lead down the dance; and, while the musician was turning his violin, without one moment's warning, the young man sallied back, and fell dead on the floor. I was immediately sent for, to assist in devising means to convey his remains to his father's house. You will be better able to judge what were the emotions of my heart, when I tell you that that young man was my own brother.'"

Trifle not, then, with thy convictions, for eternity shall be too short for thee to utter thy lamentations over such trifling.

The Prodigal's Reception

"And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him"—Luke xv. 20.

THERE he is! he is as wretched as misery itself; as filthy as his brute associates who could satisfy themselves with husks, while he could not. His clothes hang about him in rags, and what he is without, that he is within. He is disgraced in the eyes of the good, and the virtuous remember him with indignation. He has some desires to go back to his father's house; but *these desires are not sufficient to alter his condition.* Mere desires have not scraped the filth from him, nor have they so much as patched his rags. Whatever he may or may not desire, he is still filthy, still disgraced, still an alien from his father's house: and he knows it, for he has come to himself. He would have been angry if we had said as much as this before, but now we cannot describe him in words too black. With many tears and sighs he assures us that he is even worse than he appears to be, and that no man can know all the depth of the vileness of his conduct: he has spent his living with harlots; he has despised a generous parent's love and broken lose from his wise control; he has done evil with both his hands to the utmost of his strength and opportunity. There he stands, notwithstanding this confession, just what I have described him to be; for even though he has said within himself, "I have sinned," yet *that confession has not removed his griefs.* He acknowledges that he is not worthy to be called a son—and it is true he is not; but his unworthiness is not removed by his consciousness of it, nor by his confession of it. He has no claims to a father's love. If that father shuts the door in his face, he acts with justice to him; if he shall refuse so much as to speak a single word, except words of rebuke, no one can blame the father, for the son has so sadly erred. To this the son utters no demur; he confesses that if he be cast away for ever, he deserves it well. This picture, I know, is the photograph of some who are now present. You feel your vileness and sinfulness, but you cannot look

upon that sense of vileness as in any way extenuating or altering your condition. You feel, but you cannot plead your feelings. You confess this morning that you have desires towards God, but that you have no rights to him—you cannot demand anything at his hands. If your soul were sent to hell, his righteous law approves it, and so does your own conscience. You can see your rags, you can mark your filthiness, you can long for something better, but you *are* no better; you have no more claims than you used to have upon God's mercy; you stand here to-day, a self-convicted offender against the lovingkindness and holiness of God. I pray that to such of you as are in this case, I may be the bearer of a message from God to your soul this morning. O you who know the Lord, put up earnest and silent prayers just now, that my message may come home with power to troubled consciences; and I beseech you, for your own profit, look back to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged, and to the miry clay whence ye were drawn, and remember how God received you. And while we talk of what he is willing and able to do to the far off sinners, let your souls leap with joyous gratitude at the recollection of how he received you into his love, and made you partakers of his grace in days gone by.

There are two things in the text: the first is *the condition of many a seeker—he is yet a great way off;* and then, secondly, *the matchless kindness of the father towards him.*

I. First, dear friends, THE CONDITION OF SUCH A SEEKER—HE IS YET A GREAT WAY OFF.

He is a great way off if you consider one or two things. Remember *his want of strength.* This poor young man had for some time been without food—brought so very low that the husks upon which the swine fed would have seemed a dainty to him if he could have eaten them. He is so hungry that he has become emaciated, and to him every mile has the weariness of leagues within it. It costs him many pains and sore griefs to drag himself along, even though it be but an inch. So the sinner is a long way off from God when you consider his utter want of strength to come to God. Even such strength as God has given him is very painfully used. God has given him strength enough to desire salvation, but those desires are always accompanied with deep and sincere grief for sin. The point which he has already reached has exhausted all his power, and all he can do is to fall down before Jesus, and say,

> "Oh! for this no strength have I,
> My strength is at thy feet to lie."

He is a great way off again, if you consider *his want of courage.* He longs to see his father, but yet the probabilities are that if his father should come he would run away: the very sound of his father's footsteps would act upon him as they did on Adam in the garden—he would hide himself among the trees; so that instead of crying after his father, the great Father would have to cry after him—"Where art thou, poor fallen creature? where art thou?" His want of courage, therefore, makes the distance long, for every step hitherto has been taken as though into the jaws of death. "Ah!" saith the sinner, "it must be long before I can dare to hope, for mine inquities have gone over my

head so that I cannot look up." Are you then in alarm and dread this morning? Your prayers seem to yourself to have been no prayers at all; when you think of God, terror comes over your mind, and you feel that you are a long, long way from him; you imagine that it is not likely that he will hear your cries nor give heed to your words. You are yet a great way off.

You are a great way off when we consider *the difficulty of the way of repentance.* John Bunyan tells us that Christian found, when he went back to the arbour after his lost roll, that it was very hard work going back. Every backslider finds it so, and every penitent sinner knows that there is a bitterness in mourning for sin comparable to the loss of one's only son. A drowning man feels no great pain: the sensations of drowning are even said to be pleasant; it is only when the man is being restored to life, when the blood begins to make the veins tingle because life leaps there, when once again the nerves are sensible, then we are told that the whole body is full of many agonies, but then they are the agonies of life: and so the poor penitent feels the goal must be a great way, for if he had to feel as he now feels, even for a month, it were a great time; and if he had to journey many miles as he now journeys, so painfully, with such bleeding feet, it would indeed be a great way.

Let us look into this matter, and show that while the road seems long on this account, *it really is long* if we view it in certain lights. There are many seeking sinners who are a great way off in *their life.* I think I see the man now, and hear him thus bewail himself, "I have left off my drunkenness. I could not sit where I used to sit by the hour. I thank God I shall never be seen reeling through the streets again, for that grovelling lust I detest. I have given up Sabbath-breaking, and I am found in God's house; and I have endeavoured, as much as I can, to renounce the habit of swearing, but still I am a great way off; I do not feel as if I could yet lay hold of Christ, for I cannot master my own passions yet. An old companion stopped me this week, and he had not long been talking before I found the old man was in me, and the old lustings came up into my face again. Why, sir, the other day an oath came rapping out. I thought I had got over it, but I had not—I am a great way off. When I read of what saints are, and observe what true Christians are, I do feel that my conduct is so inconsistent and so widely apart from what it ought to be, that I am a great way off." Ah! dear friend, you are; and if you had to come to God by the way of your own righteousness you would never reach him, for he is not thus to be found. Christ Jesus is the way. He is the safe, sure, and perfect road to God. He who sees Jesus, has seen the Father; but he who looks to himself will only see despair. The road to heaven by Mount Sinai is impassable by mortal man, but Calvary leads to glory; the secret places of the stairs are in the wounds of Jesus.

Again, you feel yourself a great way off as to *knowledge.* "Why," say you, "before I felt thus I considered myself a master of all theology: I could twist the doctrines round my fingers. When I listened to a sermon I felt quite able to criticize it, and to give my judgment. Now I see that my judgment was about as valuable as the criticism of a blind man upon a picture, for I was without spiritual sight.

Now I feel myself to be a fool. I do know what sin means, but only to a degree. Even here I feel that I am not conscious of the heinousness of human guilt. I have heard the doctrine of the atonement of Christ, and I thank God I know it to some degree, but the excellence and glory of the substitutionary sacrifice which Christ offered I confess I do not fully comprehend." The sinner's confession now is that instead of understanding Scripture he finds he needs to go like a child to school to learn the A B C of it. "O sir," says he, "I am a great way off from God, for I am so ignorant, so foolish, I seem to be but as a beast when I think of the deep things of God." Ah! poor soul, poor young wandering brother, I wonder not that it seems so to you, for the ignorance of the carnal man is indeed fearful, and only God can give thee light; but he can give it to thee in a moment, and the distance between thee and him upon the score of ignorance can be bridged at once, and thou mayst comprehend even to-day, with all saints, what are the heights and depths, and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

In another point also many an earnest seeker is a great way off, I mean in *his repentance.* "Alas!" says he, "I cannot repent as I ought. If I could feel the brokenness of heart which I have heard and seen in some! Oh! what would I give for penitential sighs; how thankful should I be if my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, if I could even feel that I was as humble as the poor publican, and could stand with downcast eyes and beat upon my breast and say, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' But, alas! I have been a hearer of the Word for years, and all the progress I have made is so little, that while I know the gospel to be true, I do not feel it. I know myself to be a sinner, and sometimes I mourn over it, but my mourning is so superficial, my repentance is a repentance that needs to be repented of. O sir, if God would use the heaviest hammer that he had, if he would but break my heart, every broken fragment should bless his name. I wish I had a genuine repentance. Oh! how I pant to be brought to feel that I am lost, and to desire Christ with that vehement desire which will not take a denial; but in this point my heart seems hard as hell-hardened steel, cold as a rock of ice, it will not, cannot yield, though wooed by love divine. Adamant itself may run in liquid torrents, but my soul yields to nothing. Lord, break it! Lord, break it!!" Ah! poor heart, I see thou art a great way off, but dost thou know if my Lord should appear to thee this morning, and say to thee, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," thine heart would break in a moment?

> "Law and terrors do but harden,
> All the while they work alone;
> But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
> Can dissolve a heart of stone."

Great way off as you are, if the Lord pardons you, while yet callous, and consciously hard of heart, will you not then fall at his feet and commend that great love wherewith he loved you, even when ye were dead in trespasses and sins?

Yes, but I think I hear one say, "There is another point in which I

feel a great way off, for I have little or no *faith*. I have heard faith preached every Sabbath day; I know what it is, I think I do, but I cannot reach it. I know that if I cast myself wholly upon Christ I shall be saved. I quite comprehend that he does not ask anything of me, any willings, or doings, or feelings: I know that Christ is willing to receive the greatest sinner out of hell if that sinner will but come and simply trust him. I have tried to do it; sometimes I have thought I had faith, but then again when I have looked at my sins I have doubted so dreadfully, that I perceive I have no faith at all. There are sunshiny moments with me when I think I can say—

> "My faith is built on nothing less,
> Than Jesus' blood and righteousness."

but oh! when I feel my corruptions within rising upon me, I hear a voice saying, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," and straightway I discover my own weakness. I have not the faith that I want; I am a great way off from it, and I fear that I shall never possess it. Yes, my brethren, I perceive your difficulty, for I have felt the sorrow of it myself; but oh! my Lord, who is the giver of faith, who is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins, can give you the faith you so much desire, and can cause you this morning to rest with perfect confidence upon the work which he has finished for you.

To gather up all things in one word, the truly penitent sinner feels that he is yet a great way off *in everything*. There is no point upon which you can talk with him but it will be sure to lead to a confession of his deficiency. Begin to put him in the scales of the sanctuary, and he cries, "Alas! before you put in the weights I can tell you I shall be found wanting." Bring him to the touchstone, and he shrinks from it; "Nay," says he, "but I cannot endure any sort of trial—

> 'All unholy and unclean,
> I am nothing else but sin.'"

See, see, how well my Master has pictured your case in this parable—"Yet a great way off," yet covered with rags, yet polluted with filth, yet in disgrace, yet a stranger to your Father's house, there is only this one point about you, you have your face towards your Father, you have a desire towards God, and you would, oh! you would if you could, lay hold upon eternal life. But you feel too far off for anything like comfortable hope; now I must confess I feel many fears about you who are in this state; I am afraid lest you should come so far and yet go back; for there are many whom we thought had come as far as this, and yet they have gone back after all. Oh! remember that desires after God will not change you so as to save you. You must find Christ. Remember that to say, "I will arise" is not enough, nor even to arise; you must never rest till your Father has given you the kiss, till he has put on you the best robe. I am afraid lest you should rest satisfied and say, "I am in a good state; the minister tells us that many are brought to such a state before they are saved. I will stop here." My dear friend, it is a good state *to pass through*, but it is a bad state *to rest in*. I pray you never be content with a sense of sin, never be satisfied with merely knowing that you are not what you

ought to be. It never cures the fever for a man to know he has it; his knowledge is in some degree a good sign, for it proves that the fever has not yet driven him to delirium; but it never gives a man perfect health to know that he is sick. It is a good thing for him to know it, for he will not otherwise send for the physician; but except it lead to that, he will die whether he feels himself to be sick or no. A mere consciousness that you are hungry while your father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, will not stay your hunger, you want more than this. You are a great way off, and I beseech you remember the danger is, lest you should stop here or should lose what sensibility you already have. Perhaps despair may come upon you. Some have commited suicide while under a sense of the greatness of their distance from God, because they dared not look to the Saviour. Our prayers shall go up to God that the second part of our text may come true to you, and that alike backsliding and despair may be prevented by the speedy coming of God dressed in the robes of grace to meet your guilty soul, and give you joy and peace through believing.

II. Secondly—and O may the Master give us his help—we have to consider THE MATCHLESS KINDNESS OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER. We must take each word and dwell upon it.

First of all, we have here *divine observation*. "When he was yet a great way off *his father saw him*." It is true he has always seen him. God sees the sinner in every state and in every position. Ay, and sees him with an eye of love too—such a chosen sinner as is described in this text—not with complacency, but still with affection. God looks upon his wandering chosen ones. I say that father saw his son when he spent his living with harlots, saw him with deep sorrow, when he fain would have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat; but now, if there can be such a thing as for divine omniscience to become more exact, the father sees him with an eye full of a more tender love, a greater care. "His father saw *him*." Oh! what a sight it was for a father to see! His son, it is true, but his reprobate son, who had dishonoured his father's name; brought down the name of an honourable house to be mentioned among the dregs and scum of the earth. There he is! What a sight for a *father's* eye! He is filthy, as though he had been rolling in the mire; and his gay clothing has long ago lost its fine colours, and hangs about him in wretched rags. The father does not turn away and try to forget him, he fixes his full gaze upon him. Sinner, thou knowest that God sees thee this morning; sitting in this house thou art observed of the God of heaven. There is not a desire in thy heart unread of him, nor a tear in thine eye which he doth not observe. I tell thee he has seen thy midnight

sins, he has heard thy cursings and thy blasphemies, and yet he has loved thee notwithstanding all that thou hast done. Thou couldst hardly have been a worse rebel against him, and yet he has noted thee in his book of love, and determined to save thee, and the eye of his love has followed thee whithersoever thou hast gone. Is there not some comfort here? Why could not *he* see his father? Was it the effect of the tears in his eyes that he could not see? or was it that his father was of quicker sight than he? Sinner, thou canst not see God, for thou art unbelieving, and carnal, and blind, but he can see thee; thy tears of penitence block up thy sight, but thy Father is quick of eye, and he beholds thee and loves thee now; in every glance there is love. "His father saw him."

Observe this was a loving observation, for it is written, "*His father* saw him." He did not see him as a mere casual observer; he did not note him as a man might note his friend's child with some pity and benevolence, but he marked him as a father alone can do. What a quick eye a parent hath! Why, I have known a young man come home, perhaps for a short holiday: the mother has heard nothing, not even a whisper, as to her son's conduct, and yet she cannot help observing to her husband, "There is a something about John which makes me suspect that he is not going on as he should do. I do not know, my husband," she says, "what it is, but yet I am sure he is getting among bad companions." She will read his character at once. And the father notes something, too, he cannot precisely say what, but cause for anxiety he knows it to be. But here we have a Father who can see everything, and who has as much of the quickness of love as he has of the certainty of knowledge. He can, therefore, see from every spot and bruise, and note every putrifying sore. He sees his poor son right through as though he were a vase of crystal; he reads his heart, not merely the tell-tale garments, not merely the sorrowful tale of the unwashed face and those clouted shoes, but he can read his soul, he understands the whole of his miserable plight. O poor sinner, there is no need for thee to give information to thy God, for he knows it already; you need not pick your words in prayer in order to make your case plain and perspicuous, for God can see it, and all you have to do is to uncover your wounds, your bruises, and your putrifying sores, and say, "My Father, thou seest it all, the black tale thou readest in a moment, my Father, have pity upon me."

The next thought to be well considered is *divine compassion*. "When he saw him he had compassion on him." Does not the word *com-passion* mean *suffering-with* or *fellow-suffering?* What is compassion, then, but putting yourself into the place of the sufferer and feeling his grief?

If I may so say, the father put himself into the son's rags, and then felt as much pity for him as that poor ragged prodigal could have felt for himself. I do not know how to bring up your compassion this morning, except it is by supposing that it is your own case. I will suppose, father, it is a son of yours. I saw, not many hours ago, a young man who brought to my mind the prodigal in this case: his face marked with innumerable lines of sin and wretchedness, his body lean and emaciated, his clothes close-buttoned, his whole appearance the very mirror of woe. He knocked at my door. I knew his case; I cannot hurt him by telling it. He had disgraced his family, not once nor twice, but many times. At last he drew out what money he had in the business of a respectable family, came up to London with four hundred pounds, and in about five weeks spent it all; and, without a single farthing to help himself, he often wants for bread, and I fear that he has often crept at night into the parks to sleep, and thus has brought aches and pains into his bones which will hold by him till he dies. He wanders the streets by day a vagabond and a reprobate. I have written to his friends, the case has been put before them; they will not own him; and considering his shameful conduct, I do not wonder at it. He has no father and no mother left. If he were helped beyond mere food and lodging, as far as we can judge, it would be money thrown away; if he were helped, he seems so desperately set on wickedness, that he would do the same again. Yet, as I think, I can but desire to see him have one more trial at the least, and he would have it, I doubt not, if *his father* yet lived; but others feel the fountains of their love are stayed. As I think of him, I cannot but feel that if he were a son of mine and I were his father, and I saw him in such a case come to my door, whatever the crime was that he had committed, I must fall upon his neck and kiss him; the hugest sin could not put out for ever the sparks of paternal love. I might condemn the sin in terms the sharpest and most severe; I might regret that he had ever been born, and cry with David, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee!" but I could not shut him out of my house, nor refuse to call him my child. My child he is, and my child he shall be till he dies. You feel just now that if it were your child you would do the same. That is how God feels towards you, his chosen, his repentant child. You *are* his child; I hope so, I trust so; those desires which you have in your soul towards him, make me feel that you are one of his children, and as God looks out of heaven he knows what you mean. What is it? What shall I say? Nay, I need not describe, but, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." He will have compassion upon you; he will receive you to his bosom now. Be of good courage, for the text says, "He had compassion on him."

Notice and observe carefully *the swiftness of this divine love:*— "He ran." Probably he was walking on the top of his house and looking out for his son, when one morning he just caught a glimpse of a poor sorry figure in the distance. If he had been anything but the father he would not have known it to be his son, he was so altered; but he looked and looked again, till at last he said, "It is he! oh! what marks of famine are upon him, and of suffering too!" And down comes the old gentleman—I think I see him running downstairs, and the servants come to the windows and the doors, and say, "Where is master going? I have not seen him run at that rate for many a-day." See, there he goes; he does not take the road, for that is a little round about; but there is a gap through the hedge, and he is jumping over it; the straightest way that he can find he chooses; and before the son has had time to notice who it is, he is on him, and has his arms about him, falling upon his neck and kissing him. I recollect a young prodigal who was received in the same way. Here he stands, it is I, myself. I sat in a little chapel, little dreaming that *my Father* saw me; certainly I was a great way off. I felt something of my need of Christ, but I did not know what I must do to be saved; though taught the letter of the Word, I was spiritually ignorant of the plan of salvation; though taught it from my youth up, I knew it not. I felt, but I did not feel what I wished to feel. If ever there was a soul that knew itself to be far off from God, I was that soul; and yet in a moment, in one single moment, no sooner had I heard the words, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," no sooner had I turned my eyes to Jesus crucified, than I felt my perfect reconciliation with God, I knew my sins to be forgiven. There was no time for getting out of my heavenly Father's way, it was done, and done in an instant; and in my case, at least, he ran and fell upon my neck to kiss me. I hope that will be the case this morning; before you can get out of this place, before you can get back to your old doubtings, and fearings, and sighings, and cryings, I hope here the Lord of love will run and meet you, and fall upon your neck and kiss you.

After noticing thus, *observation, compassion,* and *swiftness,* do not forget *the nearness:* "He fell upon his neck and kissed him." This I can understand by experience, but it is too wonderful for me to explain, "he fell upon his neck." If he had stood at a distance and said, "John, I should be very glad to kiss you, but you are too filthy; I do not know what may be under those filthy rags; I do not feel inclined to fall upon your neck just yet; you are too far gone for me. I love you, but there is a limit to the display of love. When I have got you into a proper state, then I may manifest my affection to you, but I cannot just now, while you are so very foul." Oh! no; but before he is washed he falls on his neck—there is the wonder of it. I can understand how G

manifests his love to a soul that is washed in Jesus' blood, and knows it; but how he could fall upon the neck of a foul, filthy sinner *as such!* There it is—not as sanctified, not as having anything good in himself, but as nothing but a filthy, foul, desperate rebel, God falls upon his neck and kisses him. Oh! strange miracle of love! The riddle is unriddled when you recollect that God never had looked upon that sinner, as he was in himself, but had always looked upon him as he was in Christ; and when he fell upon that prodigal's neck, he did in effect only fall upon the neck of his once-suffering Son, Jesus Christ, and he kissed the sinner because he saw him in Christ, and therefore did not see the sinner's loathsomeness, but saw only Christ's comeliness, and therefore kissed him as he would have kissed his substitute. Observe how near God comes to the sinner. It was said of that eminent saint and martyr, Bishop Hooper, that on one occasion a man in deep distress was allowed to go into his prison to tell his tale of conscience; but Bishop Hooper looked so sternly upon him, and addressed him so severely at first, that the poor soul ran away, and could not get comfort until he had sought out another minister of a gentler aspect. Now Hooper really was a gracious and loving soul, but the sternness of his manner kept the penitent off. There is no such stern manner in our heavenly Father, he loves to receive his prodigals. When he comes there is no "Hold off!" no "Keep off!" to the sinner, but he falls upon his neck and he kisses him.

There is yet another thought to be brought out of the metaphor of kissing; we are not to pass that over without dipping our cup in the honey. In kissing his son the father *recognises relationship.* He said, with emphasis, "Thou art my son," and the prodigal was

> "To his Father's bosom pressed,
> Once for all a child confessed."

Again, that kiss was the seal of *forgiveness.* He would not have kissed him if he had been angry with him; he forgave him, forgave him all. There was, moreover, something more than forgiveness, there was *acceptance*—"I receive you back into my heart as though you were worthy of all that I give to your elder brother, and therefore I kiss you." Surely also this was a kiss of delight—as if he took pleasure in him, delighting in him, feasting his eyes with the sight of him, and feeling more happy to see him than to see all his fields, and the fatted calves, and all the treasures that he possessed. His delight was in seeing this poor restored child. Surely this is all summed up in a kiss. And if this morning my Father, and your Father, should come out to meet mourning penitents, in a moment he will show you that you are his children, you shall say, "Abba, Father," on your road to your own house; you shall feel that your sin is all forgiven, that every particle of it is cast behind

Jehovah's back; you shall feel to-day that you are accepted—as your faith looks to Christ you shall see that God accepts you, because Christ your substitute is worthy of God's love and God's delight. Nay; I trust you shall this very morning delight yourself in God, because God delights himself in you, and you shall hear him whisper in your ear, "Thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah . . . for the Lord delighteth in thee." I wish I could picture such a text as this as it ought to be; it needs some tender, sympathetic heart, some man who is the very soul of pathos, to work out the tender touches of such a verse as this. But, oh! though I cannot describe it, I hope you will feel it, and that is better than description. I come not here to paint the scene, except to be the brush in God's hand to paint it on your hearts. There are some of you who can say, "I do not want descriptions, for I have felt it; I went to Christ and told him my case, and prayed him to meet me; now I believe on him, and I have gone my way rejoicing in him."

We will just say these words and have done. In summing up, one may notice that this sinner, though he was a great way off, was *not received to full pardon and to adoption and acceptance by a gradual process, but he was received at once.* He was not allowed to enter into the out-house first, and to sleep in a barn at night, and then afterwards allowed to come sometimes and have his meals with the servants in the kitchen, and then afterwards allowed to sit at the bottom of the table and by degrees brought near. No; but the father fell on his neck and kissed him the first moment; he gets as near to God the first moment as he ever will. So a saved soul may not enjoy and know so much, but he is as near and dear to God the first moment he believes as he ever will be; a true heir of all things in Christ, and as truly so as even when he shall mount to heaven to be glorified and to be like his Lord. Oh! what a wonder is this? Fresh from his pigstye was he not, yet in a father's bosom; fresh from the swine with their gruntings in his ears, and now he hears a father's loving words; a few days ago he was putting husks to his mouth, and now it is a father's lips that are on his lips. What a change, and all at once. I say there is no gradual process in this, but the thing is done at once, in a moment he comes to his father, his father comes to him, and he is in his father's arms.

Observe again, as there was not a gradual reception, there was *not a partial reception.* He was not forgiven on conditions; he was not received to his father's heart if he would do so-and-so. No; there were no "ifs" and no "buts;" he was kissed, and clothed, and feasted, without a single condition of any kind whatever. No questions asked—his father had cast his offences behind his back in a moment, and he was received without even a censure or a rebuke. It was not a partial reception. He was not received to some things and refused others. He was not, for instance, allowed to call himself a child, but to think

himself an inferior. No; he wears the best robe; he has the ring on his finger; he has the shoes on his feet; and he joins in eating the fatted calf; and so the sinner is not received to a second class place, but he is taken to the full position of a child of God. It is not a gradual nor yet a partial reception.

And once more, it is *not a temporary reception.* His father did not kiss him and then turn him out at the back door. He did not receive him for a time, and then afterwards say to him, "Go thy way; I have had pity upon thee; thou hast now a new start, go into the far country and mend thy ways." No; but the father would say to him what he had already said to the elder brother, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." In the parable, the son could not have the goods restored, for he had spent his part; but in the truth itself and matter of fact, God does make the man who comes in at the eleventh hour equal with the one who came in at the first hour of the day; he gives every man the penny; and he gives to the child who has been the most wandering the same privileges, and ultimately the same heritage, which he gives to his own who have been these many years with him, and have not transgressed his commandments. That is a remarkable passage in one of the prophets, where he says, "Ekron as a Jebusite;" meaning that the Philistine when converted should be treated just the same as the original inhabitants of Jerusalem; that the branches of the olive which were grafted in have the same privileges as the original branches. When God takes men from being heirs of wrath, and makes them heirs of grace, they have just as much privilege at the first as though they had been heirs of grace twenty years, because in God's sight they always were heirs of grace, and from all eternity he viewed his most wandering sons.

> "Not as they stood in Adam's fall,
> When sin and ruin covered all;
> But as they'll stand another day,
> Fairer than sun's meridian ray."

O, I would to God that he would in his infinite mercy bring some of his own dear children home this day, and he shall have the praise, world without end. Amen.

Prodigal Love for the Prodigal Son

"And kissed him"—Luke xv. 20.

In the Revised Version, if you will kindly look at the margin, you will find that the text there reads, "*And kissed him much.*" This is a very good translation of the Greek, which might bear the meaning, "Kissed him earnestly," or "Kissed him eagerly," or "Kissed him often." I prefer to have it in very plain language, and therefore adopt the marginal reading of the Revised Version, "Kissed him much," as the text of my sermon, the subject of which will be, the overflowing love of God toward the returning sinner.

The first word "and" links us on to all that had gone before. The parable is a very familiar one, yet it is so full of sacred meaning that it always has some fresh lesson for us. Let us, then, consider the preliminaries to this kissing. On the son's side there was something, and on the father's side much more. Before the prodigal son received these kisses of love, he had said in the far country, "I will arise and go to my father." He had, however, done more than that, else his father's kiss would never have been upon his cheek. The resolve had become a deed: "He arose, and came to his father." A bushelful of resolutions is of small value; a single grain of practice is worth the whole. The determination to return home is good; but it is when the wandering boy begins the business of really carrying out the good resolve, that he draws near the blessing. If any of you here present have long been saying, "I will repent; I will turn to God;" leave off resolving, and come to practising; and may God in his mercy lead you both to repent and to believe in Christ!

Before the kisses of love were given, this young man was on his way to his father; but he would not have reached him unless his father had come the major part of the way. When you give God an inch, he will give you an ell. If you come a little way to him, when you are "yet a great way off" he will run to meet you. I do

not know that the prodigal saw his father, but his father saw him. The eyes of mercy are quicker than the eyes of repentance. Even the eye of our faith is dim compared with the eye of God's love. He sees a sinner long before a sinner sees him.

I do not suppose that the prodigal travelled very fast. I should imagine that he came very slowly—

> "With heavy heart and downcast eye,
> With many a sob and many a sigh."

He was resolved to come, yet he was half afraid. But we read that his father ran. Slow are the steps of repentance, but swift are the feet of forgiveness. God can run where we can scarcely limp, and if we are limping towards him, he will run towards us. These kisses were given in a hurry; the story is narrated in a way that almost makes us realize that such was the case: there is a sense of haste in the very wording of it. His father "ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him;"—kissed him eagerly. He did not delay a moment; for though he was out of breath, he was not out of love. "He fell on his neck, and kissed him much." There stood his son ready to confess his sin; therefore did his father kiss him all the more. The more willing thou art to own thy sin, the more willing is God to forgive thee. When thou dost make a clean breast of it, God will soon make a clear record of it. He will wipe out the sin that thou dost willingly acknowledge and humbly confess before him. He that was willing to use his lips for confession, found that his father was willing to use his lips for kissing him.

See the contrast. There is the son, scarcely daring to think of embracing his father, yet his father has scarcely seen him before he has fallen on his neck. The condescension of God towards penitent sinners is very great. He seems to stoop from his throne of glory to fall upon the neck of a repentant sinner. God on the neck of a sinner! What a wonderful picture! Can you conceive it? I do not think you can; but if you cannot imagine it, I hope that you will realize it. When God's arm is about our neck, and his lips are on our cheek, kissing us much, then we understand more than preachers or books can ever tell us of his condescending love.

The father "saw" his son. There is a great deal in that word, "saw." He saw who it was; saw where he had come from; saw the swineherd's dress; saw the filth upon his hands and feet; saw his rags; saw his penitent look; saw what he had been; saw what he was; and saw what he would soon be. "His father saw him." God has a way of seeing men and women that you and I cannot understand. He sees right through us at a glance, as if we were made of glass; he sees all our past, present and future.

"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." It was not with icy eyes that the father looked on his returning son. Love leaped into them, and as he beheld him, he "had compassion on him;" that is, he felt for him. There was no anger in his heart towards his son; he had nothing but pity for his poor boy, who had got into such a pitiable condition. It was true that it was all his own fault, but that did not come before his father's mind. It was the

state that he was in, his poverty, his degradation, that pale face of his so wan with hunger, that touched his father to the quick. And God has compassion on the woes and miseries of men. They may have brought their troubles on themselves, and they have indeed done so; but nevertheless God has compassion upon them. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not."

We read that the father "ran." The compassion of God is followed by swift movements. He is slow to anger, but he is quick to bless. He does not take any time to consider how he shall show his love to penitent prodigals; that was all done long ago in the eternal covenant. He has no need to prepare for their return to him; that was all done on Calvary. God comes flying in the greatness of his compassion to help every poor penitent soul.

"On cherub and on cherubim,
Full royally he rode;
And on the wings of mighty winds
Came flying all abroad."

And when he comes, he comes to kiss. Master Trapp says that, if we had read that the father had kicked his prodigal son, we should not have been very much astonished. Well, I should have been very greatly astonished, seeing that the father in the parable was to represent God. But still, his son deserved all the rough treatment that some heartless men might have given; and had the story been that of a selfish human father only, it might have been written that "as he was coming near, his father ran at him, and kicked him." There are such fathers in the world, who seem as if they cannot forgive. If he had kicked him, it would have been no more than he had deserved. But no, what is written in the Book stands true for all time, and for every sinner,—"He fell on his neck, and kissed him;" kissed him eagerly, kissed him much.

What does this much kissing mean? It signifies that, when sinners come to God, he gives them a loving reception, and a hearty welcome. If any one of you, while I am speaking, shall come to God, expecting mercy because of the great sacrifice of Christ, this shall be true of you as it has been true of many of us: "He kissed him much."

I. First, this much kissing means MUCH LOVE. It means much love truly *felt;* for God never gives an expression of love without feeling it in his infinite heart. God will never give a Judas-kiss, and betray those whom he embraces. There is no hypocrisy with God; he never kisses those for whom he has no love. Oh, how God loves sinners! You who repent, and come to him, will discover how greatly he loves you. There is no measuring the love he bears towards you. He has loved you from before the foundation of the world, and he will love you when time shall be no more. Oh, the immeasurable love of God to sinners who come and cast themselves upon his mercy!

This much kissing also means much love *manifested.* God's people do not always know the greatness of his love to them. Sometimes, however, it is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Some of us know at times what it is to be almost too happy to live! The love of God has been so overpoweringly

experienced by us on some occasions, that we have almost had to ask for a stay of the delight because we could not endure any more. If the glory had not been veiled a little, we should have died of excess of rapture, or happiness. Beloved, God has wondrous ways of opening his people's hearts to the manifestation of his grace. He can pour in, not now and then a drop of his love, but great and mighty streams. Madame Guyon used to speak of the torrents of love that come sweeping through the spirit, bearing all before them. The poor prodigal in the parable had so much love manifested to him, that he might have sung of the torrents of his father's affection. That is the way God receives those whom he saves, giving them not a meagre measure of grace, but manifesting an overflowing love.

This much kissing means, further, much love *perceived*. When his father kissed him much, the poor prodigal knew, if never before, that his father loved him. He had no doubt about it; he had a clear perception of it. It is very frequently the case that the first moment a sinner believes in Jesus, he gets this "much" love. God reveals it to him, and he perceives it and enjoys it at the very beginning. Think not that God always keeps the best wine to the last; he gives us some of the richest dainties of his table the first moment we sit there. I recollect the joy that I had when first I believed in Jesus; and, even now, in looking back upon it, the memory of it is as fresh as if it were but yesterday. Oh, I could not have believed that a mortal could be so happy after having been so long burdened, and so terribly cast down! I did but look to Jesus on the cross, and the crushing load was immediately gone; and the heart which could only sigh and cry by reason of its burden, began to leap and dance and sing for joy. I had found in Christ all that I wanted, and I rested in the love of God at once. So may it be with you also, if you will but return to God through Christ. It shall be said of you as of this prodigal, "The father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him in much love."

II. Secondly, this much kissing meant MUCH FORGIVENESS. The prodigal had many sins to confess; but before he came to the details of them, his father had forgiven him. I love confession of sin after forgiveness. Some suppose that after we are forgiven we are never to confess; but, oh, beloved, it is then that we confess most truly, because we know the guilt of sin most really! Then do we plaintively sing—

> "My sins, my sins, my Saviour,
> How sad on thee they fall!
> Seen through thy gentle patience,
> I tenfold feel them all.
> I know they are forgiven,
> But still their pain to me
> Is all the grief and anguish
> They laid, my Lord, on thee."

To think that Christ should have washed me from my sins in his own blood, makes me feel my sin the more keenly, and confess it the more humbly before God. The picture of this prodigal is marvellously true to the experience of those who return to God. His father kissed

him with the kiss of forgiveness; and yet, after that, the young man went on to say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Do not hesitate, then, to acknowledge your sin to God, even though you know that in Christ it is all put away.

From this point of view, those kisses meant, first, "*Your sin is all gone*, and will never be mentioned any more. Come to my heart, my son! Thou hast grieved me sore, and angered me; but, as a thick cloud, I have blotted out thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins."

As the father looked upon him, and kissed him much, there probably came another kiss, which seemed to say, "*There is no soreness left:* I have not only forgiven, but I have forgotten too. It is all gone, clean gone. I will never accuse you of it any more. I will never love you any the less. I will never treat you as though you were still an unworthy and untrustworthy person." Probably at that there came another kiss; for do not forget that his father forgave him "and kissed him much," to show that the sin was all forgiven.

There stood the prodigal, overwhelmed by his father's goodness, yet remembering his past life. As he looked on himself, and thought, "I have these old rags on still, and I have just come from feeding the swine," I can imagine that his father would give him another kiss, as much as to say, "My boy, I do not recollect the past; I am so glad to see you that *I do not see any filth on you, or any rags* on you either. I am so delighted to have you with me once more that, as I would pick up a diamond out of the mire, and be glad to get the diamond again, so do I pick you up, you are so precious to me." This is the gracious and glorious way in which God treats those who return to him. As for their sin, he has put it away so that he will not remember it. He forgives like a God. Well may we adore and magnify his matchless mercy as we sing—

> "In wonder lost, with trembling joy
> We take the pardon of our God;
> Pardon for crimes of deepest dye;
> A pardon bought with Jesus' blood;
> Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> Or who has grace so rich and free?"

"Well," says one, "can such a wonderful change ever take place with me?" By the grace of God it may be experienced by every man who is willing to return to God. I pray God that it may happen now, and that you may get such assurance of it from the Word of God, by the power of his Holy Spirit, and from a sight of the precious blood of Christ shed for your redemption, that you may be able to say, "I understand it now; I see how he kisses all my sin away; and when it rises, he kisses it away again; and when I think of it with shame, he gives me another kiss; and when I blush all over at the remembrance of my evil deeds, he kisses me again and again, to assure me that I am fully and freely forgiven." Thus the many kisses from the prodigal's father combined to make his wayward son feel that his sin was indeed all gone. They revealed much love and much forgiveness.

III. These repeated kisses meant, next, FULL RESTORATION. The prodigal was going to say to his father, "Make me as one of thy

hired servants." In the far country he had resolved to make that request, but his father, with a kiss, stopped him. By that kiss, his *sonship was owned;* by it the father said to the wretched wanderer, "You are my son." He gave him such a kiss as he would only give to his own son. I wonder how many here have ever given such a kiss to anyone. There sits one who knows something of such kisses as the prodigal received. That father's girl went astray, and, after years of sin, she came back worn out, to die at home. He received her, found her penitent, and gladly welcomed her to his house. Ah, my dear friend, you know something about such kisses as those! And you, good woman, whose boy ran away, you can understand something about these kisses, too. He left you, and you did not hear of him for years, and he went on in a very vicious course of life. When you did hear of him, it well-nigh broke your heart, and when he came back, you hardly knew him. Do you recollect how you took him in? You felt that you wished that he was the little boy you used to press to your bosom; but now he was grown up to be a big man and a great sinner, yet you gave him such a kiss, and repeated your welcome so often, that he will never forget it, nor will you forget it either. You can understand that this overwhelming greeting was like the father saying, "My boy, you are my son. Despite all that you have done, you belong to me; however far you have gone in vice and folly, I own you. You are bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." In this parable Christ would have you know, poor sinner, that God will own you, if you come to him confessing your sin through Jesus Christ. He will gladly receive you; for all things are ready against the day that you return.

> "Spread for thee the festal board,
> See with richest dainties stored,
> To thy Father's bosom pressed,
> Yet again a child confessed;
> Never from his house to roam,
> Come and welcome, sinner, come."

The father received his son with many kisses, and so proved that his *prayer was answered.* Indeed, his father heard his prayer before he offered it. He was going to say, "Father, I have sinned," and to ask for forgiveness; but he got the mercy, and a kiss to seal it, before the prayer was presented. This also shall be true of thee, O sinner, who art returning to thy God, through Jesus Christ! You shall be permitted to pray, and God will answer you. Hear it, poor, despairing sinner, whose prayer has seemed to be shut out from heaven! Come to your Father's bosom now, and he will hear your prayers; and, before many days are over, you shall have the clearest proofs that you are fully restored to the divine favour by answers to your intercessions that shall make you marvel at the Lord's loving-kindness to you.

Further than this, you shall have all your *privileges restored,* even as this wandering young man was put among the children when he returned. As you see him now in the father's house, where he was received with the many kisses, he wears a son's robe, the family ring is on his finger, and the shoes of the home are on his feet. He eats no

longer swine's food, but children's bread. Even thus shall it be with you if you return to God. Though you look so foul and so vile, and really are even more defiled than you look; and though you smell so strongly of the hogs among which you have been living that some people's nostrils would turn up at you, your Father will not notice these marks of your occupation in the far country with all its horrible defilement. See how this father treats his boy. He kisses him, and kisses him again, because he knows his own child, and, recognizing him as his child, and feeling his fatherly heart yearning over him, he gives him kiss after kiss. He kisses him much, to make him know that he has full restoration.

In this repeated kissing we see, then, these three things: much love, much forgiveness, and full restoration.

IV. But these many kisses meant even more than this. They revealed his father's EXCEEDING JOY. The father's heart is overflowing with gladness, and he cannot restrain his delight. I think he must have shown his joy by *a repeated look*. I will tell you the way I think the father behaved towards his son who had been dead, but was alive again, who had been lost, but was found. Let me try to describe the scene. The father has kissed his son, and he bids him sit down; then he comes in front of him, and looks at him, and feels so happy that he says, "I must give you another kiss," then he walks away a minute; but he is back again before long, saying to himself, "Oh, I must give him another kiss!" He gives him another, for he is so happy. His heart beats fast; he feels very joyful; the old man would like the music to strike up; he wants to be at the dancing; but meanwhile he satisfies himself by a repeated look at his long-lost child. Oh, I believe that God looks at the sinner, and looks at him again, and keeps on looking at him, all the while delighting in the very sight of him, when he is truly repentant, and comes back to his Father's house.

The repeated kiss meant, also, *a repeated blessing*, for every time he put his arms round him, and kissed him, he kept saying, "Bless you; oh, bless you, my boy!" He felt that his son had brought a blessing to him by coming back, and he invoked fresh blessings upon his head. Oh, sinner! if you did but know how God would welcome you, and how he would look at you, and how he would bless you, surely you would at once repent, and come to his arms and heart, and find yourself happy in his love.

The many kisses meant, also, *repeated delight*. It is a very wonderful thing that it should be in the power of a sinner to make God glad. He is the happy God, the source and spring of all happiness; what can we add to his blessedness? And yet, speaking after the manner of men, God's highest joy lies in clasping his wilful Ephraims to his breast, when he has heard them bemoaning themselves, and has seen them arising and returning to their home. God grant that he may see that sight even now, and have delight because of sinners returning to himself! Yea, we believe it shall be even so, because of his presence with us, and because of the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. Surely that is the teaching of the prophet's words: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee

with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Think of the eternal God singing, and remember that it is because a wandering sinner has returned to him that he sings. He joys in the return of the prodigal, and all heaven shares in his joy.

V. I have not got through my subject yet. As we take a fifth look, we find that these many kisses mean OVERFLOWING COMFORT. This poor young man, in his hungry, faint, and wretched state, having come a very long way, had not much heart in him. His hunger had taken all energy out of him, and he was so conscious of his guilt that he had hardly the courage to face his father; so his father gives him a kiss, as much as to say, "Come, boy, do not be cast down; I love you."

"Oh, *the past*, *the past*, my father!" he might moan, as he thought of his wasted years; but he had no sooner said that than he received another kiss, as if his father said, "Never mind the past; I have forgotten all about that." This is the Lord's way with his saved ones. Their past lies hidden under the blood of atonement. The Lord saith by his servant Jeremiah, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve."

But then, perhaps, the young man looked down on his foul garments, and said, "*The present*, my father, *the present*, what a dreadful state I am in!" And with another kiss would come the answer, "Never mind the present, my boy. I am content to have thee as thou art. I love thee." This, too, is God's word to those who are "accepted in the Beloved." In spite of all their vileness, they are pure and spotless in Christ, and God says of each one of them, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee. Therefore, though in thyself thou art unworthy, through my dear Son thou art welcome to my home."

"Oh, but," the boy might have said, "*the future*, my father, *the future!* What would you think if I should ever go astray again?" Then would come another holy kiss, and his father would say, "I will see to the future, my boy; I will make home so bright for you that you will never want to go away again." But God does more than that for us when we return to him. He not only surrounds us with tokens of his love, but he says concerning us, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Furthermore, he says to each returning one, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

Whatever there was to trouble the son, the father gave him a kiss to set it all right; and, in like manner, our God has a love-token for every time of doubt and dismay which may come to his reconciled sons. Perhaps one whom I am addressing says, "Even though I

confess my sin, and seek God's mercy, I shall still be in sore trouble, for through my sin, I have brought myself down to poverty." "There is a kiss for you," says the Lord: "Thy bread shall be given thee, and thy water shall be sure." "But I have even brought disease upon myself by sin," says another. "There is a kiss for you, for I am Jehovah-Rophi, the Lord that healeth thee, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases." "But I am dreadfully down at the heel," says another. The Lord gives you also a kiss, and says, "I will lift you up, and provide for all your needs. No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." All the promises in this Book belong to every repentant sinner, who returns to God believing in Jesus Christ, his Son.

The father of the prodigal kissed his son much, and thus made him feel happy there and then. Poor souls, when they come to Christ, are in a dreadful plight, and some of them hardly know where they are. I have known them talk a lot of nonsense in their despair, and say hard and wicked things of God in their dreadful doubt. The Lord gives no answer to all that, except a kiss, and then another kiss. Nothing puts the penitent so much at rest as the Lord's repeated assurance of his unchanging love. Such a one the Lord has often received, "and kissed him much," that he might fetch him up even from the horrible pit, and set his feet upon a rock, and establish his goings. The Lord grant that many whom I am addressing may understand what I am talking about!

VI. And now for our sixth head, though you will think I am getting to be like the old Puritans with these many heads. But I cannot help it, for these many kisses had many meanings: love, forgiveness, restoration, joy, and comfort were in them, and also STRONG ASSURANCE.

The father kissed his son much to make him quite certain that it was *all real.* The prodigal, in receiving these many kisses, might say to himself, "All this love must be true, for a little while ago I heard the hogs grunt, and now I hear nothing but the kisses from my dear father's lips." So his father gave him another kiss, for there was no way of convincing him that the first was real like repeating it; and if there lingered any doubt about the second, the father gave him yet a third. If, when the dream of old was doubled, the interpretation was sure, these repeated kisses left no room for doubt. The father renewed the tokens of his love that his son might be fully assured of its reality.

He did it that in the future it might *never be questioned.* Some of us were brought so low before we were converted, that God gave us an excess of joy when he saved us, that we might never forget it. Sometimes the devil says to me, "You are no child of God." I have long ago given up answering him, for I find that it is a waste of time to argue with such a crafty old liar as he is; he knows too much for me. But if I must answer him, I say, "Why, I remember when I was saved by the Lord! I never can forget even the very spot of ground where first I saw my Saviour; there and then my joy rolled in like some great Atlantic billow, and burst in mighty foam of bliss, covering all things. I cannot forget it." That is an argument which even the devil cannot answer, for he cannot make me believe

that such a thing never happened. The Father kissed me much, and I remember it full well. The Lord gives to some of us such a clear deliverance, such a bright, sunshiny day at our conversion, that henceforth we cannot question our state before him, but must believe that we are eternally saved.

The father put the assurance of this poor returning prodigal beyond all doubt. If the first kisses were given privately, when only the father and son were present, it is quite certain that, afterwards, he kissed him *before men*, where others could see him. He kissed him much in the presence of the household, that they also might not be calling in question that he was his father's child. It was a pity that the elder brother was not there also. You see he was away in the field. He was more interested in the crops than in the reception of his brother. I have known such a one in modern days. He was a man who did not come out to week-evening services. He was such a man of business that he did not come out on a Thursday night, and the prodigal came home at such a time, and so the elder brother did not see the father receive him. If he lived now, he would probably not come to the church-meetings; he would be too busy. So he would not get to know about the reception of penitent sinners. But the father, when he received that son of his, intended all to know, once for all, that he was indeed his child. Oh, that you might get these many kisses even now! If they are given to you, you will have, for the rest of your life, strong assurance derived from the happiness of your first days.

VII. I have done when I have said that I think that here we have a specimen of the INTIMATE COMMUNION which the Lord often gives to sinners when first they come to him. "His father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him much."

You see, this was *before the family fellowship*. Before the servants had prepared the meal, before there had been any music or dancing in the family, his father kissed him. He would have cared little for all their songs, and have valued but slightly his reception by the servants, if, first of all, he had not been welcomed to his father's heart. So is it with us; we need first to have fellowship with God before we think much of union with his people. Before I go to join a church, I want my Father's kiss. Before the pastor gives me the right hand of fellowship, I want my heavenly Father's right hand to welcome me. Before I become recognized by God's people here below, I want a private recognition from the great Father above; and that he gives to all who come to him as the prodigal came to his father. May he give it to some of you now!

This kissing, also, was *before the table communion*. You know that the prodigal was afterwards to sit at his father's table, and to eat of the fatted calf; but before that, his father kissed him. He would scarcely have been able to sit easily at the feast without the previous kisses of love. The table communion, to which we are invited, is very sweet. To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, in symbol, in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, is, indeed, a blessed thing; but I want to have communion with God by the way of the love-kiss before I come there. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." This is something private, ravishing, and sweet. God give it to many of you!

May you get the many kisses of your Father's mouth before you come into the church, or to the communion table!

These many kisses likewise came *before the public rejoicing.* The friends and neighbours were invited to share in the feast. But think how shamefaced the son would have been in their presence, if, first of all, he had not found a place in his father's love, or had not been quite sure of it. He would almost have been inclined to run away again. But the father had kissed him much, and so he could meet the curious gaze of old friends with a smiling face, until any unkind remarks they might have thought of making died away, killed by his evident joy in his father. It is a hard thing for a man to confess Christ if he has not had an overwhelming sense of communion with him. But when we are lifted to the skies in the rapture God gives to us, it becomes easy, not only to face the world, but to win the sympathy of even those who might have opposed themselves. This is why young converts are frequently used to lead others into the light; the Lord's many kisses of forgiveness have so recently been given to them, that their words catch the fragrance of divine love as they pass the lips just touched by the Lord. Alas, that any should ever lose their first love, and forget the many kisses they have received from their heavenly Father!

Lastly, all this was given *before the meeting with the elder brother.* If the prodigal son had known what the elder brother thought and said, I should not have wondered at all if he had run off, and never come back at all. He might have come near home, and then, hearing what his brother said, have stolen away again. Yes, but before that could happen, his father had given him the many kisses. Poor sinner! you have come in here, and perhaps you have found the Saviour. It may be that you will go and speak to some Christian man, and he will be afraid to say much to you. I do not wonder that he should doubt you, for you are not, in yourself, as yet a particularly nice sort of person to talk to. But, if you get your Father's many kisses, you will not mind your elder brother being a little hard upon you. Occasionally I hear of one, who wished to join the church, saying, "I came to see the elders, and one of them was rather rough with me. I shall never come again." What a stupid man you must be! Is it not their duty to be a little rough with some of you, lest you should deceive yourselves, and be mistaken about your true state? We desire lovingly to bring you to Christ, and if we are afraid that you really have not yet come back to God, with penitence and faith, should we not tell you so, like honest men? But suppose that you have really come, and your brother is mistaken; go and get a kiss from your Father, and never mind your brother. He may remind you how you have squandered your living, painting the picture even blacker than it ought to be; but your Father's kisses will make you forget your brother's frowns. If you think that in the household of faith you will find everybody amiable, and everyone willing to help you, you will be greatly mistaken. Young Christians are often frightened when they come across some who, from frequent disappointment of their hopes, or from a natural spirit of caution, or perhaps from a lack of spiritual life, receive but coldly those upon whom the Father has lavished much love. If that is your case, never mind these cross-grained elder brethren; get

another kiss from your Father. Perhaps the reason it is written, "He kissed him *much*," was because the elder brother, when he came near him, would treat him so coldly, and so angrily refuse to join in the feast.

Lord, give to many poor trembling souls the will to come to thee! Bring many sinners to thy blessed feet, and while they are yet a great way off, run and meet them; fall on their neck, give them many kisses of love, and fill them to the full with heavenly delight, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

The Reception of Sinners

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry"—Luke xv. 22, 26.

LAST Lord's-day we spoke upon the consecration of priests. That theme might seem too high for troubled hearts and trembling consciences, who fear that they shall never be made priests and kings unto God. So glorious a privilege appears to them to hang in the dim, distant future, if, indeed, they reach it at all. Therefore, at this time, we will go down from the elevated regions to comfort those who are seeking the Lord, with the view of helping them in their turn to climb also.

We speak this morning, not of the consecration of priests, but of the reception of sinners, and this, according to our text, is a very joyful business, it is even described as a merrymaking, accompanied with music and with dancing. We very frequently speak of the sorrow for sin which accompanies conversion, and I do not think we can speak of it too often; but yet there is a possibility of our overlooking the equally holy and remarkable joy which attends the return of a soul to God. It has been a very common error to suppose that a man must pass through a very considerable time of despondency, if not of horror of mind, before he can find peace with God: now in this parable the father seems determined to cut short that period; he stops his son in the very middle of his confession, and before he can ask to be made as one of the hired servants, his mournful style is changed for rejoicing, for the father has already fallen on his neck and kissed his trembling lips into a sweet silence. It is not the Lord's desire that sinners should tarry long in the state of unbelieving conviction of sin, it is something wrong in themselves which keeps them there; either they are ignorant of the freeness and fulness of Christ, or they harbour self-righteous hopes, or they cling to their sins. Sin lieth at the door, it

is no work of God which blocks the way. He delights in their delight, and joys in their joy. It is the Father's will that the penitent sinner should at once believe in Jesus, at once find complete forgiveness, and immediately enter into rest. If any of you came to Jesus without the dreary interval of terror which is so frequent, I pray you do not judge yourselves as though your conversions were dubious—they are all the more instead of all the less genuine because they bear rather the marks of the gospel than of the law. The weeping of Peter, which in a few days turns to joy, is far better than the horror of Judas, which ends in suicide. Conversions, as recorded in Scripture, are for the most part exceedingly rapid. They were pricked in the heart at Pentecost, and the same day they were baptised and added to the church, because they had found peace with God through Jesus Christ. Paul was smitten down with conviction, and in three days was a baptised believer. Perhaps the figure is inapt, but I was about to say that sometimes God's power is so very near us that the lightning flash of conviction is often attended at the very same moment by the deep thunder of the Lord's voice, which drives away our fears and proclaims peace and pardon to the soul. In many cases the sharp needle of the law is immediately followed by the silken thread of the gospel; the showers of repentance are succeeded at once by the sunshine of faith; peace overtakes penitence, and walks arm in arm with her into yet fuller rest.

Having thus reminded you that God would have penitents very soon rejoice, I want to spend this morning in setting forth the joy which is caused by pardoned sin. That joy is threefold. We will talk about it, first, as *the joy of God over sinners;* secondly, *the joy of sinners in God;* and, thirdly, what is so often forgotten, *the joy of the servants,* for they too rejoiced, for the father said, "Let *us* eat and be merry;" and one of the points of the parable is just this, that as in the case of the lost sheep the shepherd calleth together his friends and neighbours, and as in the case of the piece of money the woman calleth her neighbours together, so in this case, also, others share in the joy which chiefly belongs to the loving father and the returning wanderer.

I. THE JOY OF GOD OVER SINNERS. It is always difficult to speak of the ever-blessed God becomingly when we have to describe him as touched by emotions; I pray, therefore, to be guided in my speech by the Holy Spirit. We have been educated into the idea that the Lord is above emotions, either of sorrow or pleasure. That he cannot suffer, for instance, is always laid down as a self-evident postulate. Is that quite so clear? Cannot he do or bear anything he chooses to do? What means the Scripture which says that man's sin before the flood made the Lord repent that he had made man on the earth, "and it grieved him at his heart"? Is there no meaning in the Lord's own language, "Forty years long was I grieved with this generation"? Are we not forbidden to grieve the Holy Spirit? Is he not described as having been vexed by ungodly men! Surely, then, he can be grieved: it cannot be an altogether meaningless expression. For my part, I rejoice to worship the living God, who, because he is living, does grieve and rejoice. It makes one feel more love to him than if he dwelt on some serene Olympus, careless of all our woes, because inca-

pable of any concern about us, or interest in us, one way or the other. To look upon him as utterly impassive and incapable of anything like emotion does not, to my mind, exalt the Lord, but rather brings him down to be comparable to the gods of stone or wood, which cannot sympathise with their worshippers. No, Jehovah is not insensible. He is the living God, and everything that goes with life,—pure, perfect, holy life, is to be found in him. Yet must such a subject always be spoken of very tenderly, with solemn awe, because, albeit we know something of what God is, for we are made in the image of God, and the best likeness of God undoubtedly was man as he came from his Maker's hand, yet man is not God, and even in his perfectness he must have been a very tiny miniature of God; while now that he has sinned he has blotted and blurred that image. The finite cannot fully mirror the Infinite, nor can the grand, glorious, essential properties of Deity be communicated to creatures: they must remain peculiar to God alone. The Lord is, however, continually represented as displaying joy. Moses declared to sinful Israel, that if they returned and obeyed the voice of the Lord, the Lord would again rejoice over them for good, as he rejoiced over their fathers (Deut. xxx. 9). The Lord is said to rejoice in his works and to delight in mercy, and surely we must believe it. Wherefore should we doubt it? Many passages of Scripture speak very impressively of God's joy in his people. Zephaniah puts it in the strongest manner: "He will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Our God is for ever the happy or blessed God; we cannot think of him as other than supremely blessed. Still, from the Scriptures we gather that he displays on certain occasions a special joy which he would have us recognise. I do not think that it can be mere parable, but it is real fact, that the Lord does rejoice over returning and repenting sinners.

Every being manifests its joy according to its nature, and seeks means for its display suitable to itself. It is so with men. When the old Romans celebrated a triumph because some great general returned a victor from Africa, Greece, or Asia with the spoils of a long campaign, how did the fierce Roman nature express its joy? Why, in the Colosseum, or in some yet vaster amphitheatre, where buzzing nations choked the ways, they gathered in their myriads to behold not only beasts, but their fellow men, "butchered to make a Roman holiday." Cruelty upon an extraordinary scale was their way of expressing the joy of their iron hearts. Look at the self-indulgent man! He has had a prosperous season, and has made a lucky hit, as he calls it, or some event has occurred in his family which makes him very jubilant; what will he do to show forth his joy? Will he bow the knee in gratitude, or lift a hymn of praise? Not he. He will hold a drinking bout, and when he and his fellows are mad with wine his joy will find expression! The sensual show their joy by sensuality. Now, God whose name is good, and whose nature is love, when he has joy expresses it in mercy, in lovingkindness, and grace. The father's joy in the parable before us showed itself in the full forgiveness accorded, in the kiss of perfect love bestowed, in the gift of the best robe, the ring, and the sandals, and in the gladsome festival which filled the

whole house with hallowed mirth. Everything expresses its joy according to its nature; infinite love, therefore, reveals its joy in acts of love.

The nature of God being as much above ours as the heaven is above the earth, the expression of his joy is therefore all the loftier, and his gifts the greater. Still, there is a likeness between God's way of expressing joy and ours, which it will be profitable to note. How do we express ourselves, ordinarily, when we are glad? We do so very commonly by a display of *bounty*. When in the olden time our kings came into the city of London, or a great victory was celebrated, the conduit in Cheapside ran with red wine, and even the gutters flowed with it. Then were there tables set in the street, and my lords, and the aldermen, and the mayor kept open house, and everybody was fed to the full. Joy was expressed by hospitality. You have seen the picture of the young heir coming of age, and have noticed how the artist depicts the great yard of the manor-house as full of men and women, who are eating and drinking to their hearts' content. At Christmas seasons, and upon marriage days and harvest homes, men ordinarily express their joy by bountiful provision; so also does the father in this wondrous parable exhibit the utmost bounty, representing thereby the boundless liberality of the great Father of spirits, who shows his joy over penitents by the manner in which he entertains them. The best robe, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf, and the "Let us eat and be merry," all show by their bountifulness that God is glad. His oxen and his fatlings are killed, for the feast of mercy is the banquet of the Lord. So unrivalled are the gifts of his gracious hand that the receivers of his favours have cried out in amazement, "Who is a God like unto thee!" Beloved, consider awhile the Lord's bounty to returning sinners, blotting out their sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud their iniquities, justifying them in the righteousness of Christ, endowing them with his Holy Spirit, regenerating them, comforting them, illuminating them, purifying them, strengthening them, guiding them, protecting them, filling them with all his own fulness, satisfying their mouth with good things, and crowning them with tender mercies. I see in the bounty of God with which he so liberally endows returning sinners a mighty proof that his inmost soul rejoices over the salvation of men.

At glad times men generally manifest some *speciality* in their bounty. On the day of the young heir's coming of age the long stored cask of wine is broached, and the best bullock is roasted whole. So here in the parable we read, "*Bring forth* the best robe," indicating that it had been laid by and kept in store until then. Nobody had used that robe, it was locked up in the wardrobe, only to be brought out on some very special occasion. This was the happiest day that ever had made glad the house, and therefore "Bring forth the best robe," no other will suffice. Meat is wanted for the banquet. Let a calf be killed. Which shall it be? A calf taken at random from the herd? No, but *the fatted* calf which has been standing in the stalls, and is well fed, and has been reserved for a festival. Oh, beloved, when God blesses a sinner he shows his joy by giving him the reserved mercies, the *special* treasures of everlasting love, the precious things of grace, the secret of the covenant: yea, he has given to sinners the best of the best in giving

them Christ Jesus, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The best that heaven affords God bestows on sinners when they come to him. No scraps and odds and ends are dealt out to hungry and thirsty seekers, but in princely munificence of unstinting love the heavenly Father deals out abundant grace. I would that sinners would come and try my Lord's hospitality; they would find his table to be more richly loaded than even that of Solomon, though thirty oxen and a hundred sheep did not suffice for one day's provision for the household of that magnificent sovereign. If they would but come, even the largest-hearted among them would be wonder-struck as they saw how richly God supplied all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

"Rags exchanged for costly treasure,
Shoes and ring and heaven's best robe!
Gifts of *love* which knows no measure;
Who can tell the heart of God?
All his loved ones—his redeemed ones,
Perfect are in his abode."

We also show our joy by a *concentration of thought* upon the object of it. When a man is carried away with joy he forgets everything else, and gives himself up to the one delight. David was so glad to bring back the Ark of the Lord that he danced before the Lord with all his might, being clad only with a linen ephod. He laid aside his stately garments, and thought so little of his dignity that Michal sneered at him; he was so much absorbed in adoring his Lord that all regard to appearances was quite gone. Observe well the parable, and think you hear the father say, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on *him*, and put a ring on *his* hand and shoes on *his* feet, and let us eat and be merry, for *this my son* was dead and is alive again." The son alone is in the father's eye, and the whole house must be ordered in reference to him. Nothing is to be thought of to-day but the long-lost son, he is paramount in the wardrobe, the jewel room, the farmyard, the kitchen, and the banquetting chamber. He that was lost, he that was dead, he being found and alive, engrosses the whole of the father's mind. Sinner, it is wonderful how God sets all his thoughts on you according to his promise, "I will set mine eyes upon them for good," (Jer. xxiii. 6); and again, "I will watch over them to build and to plant saith the Lord." The Lord thinketh upon the poor and needy, his eyes are upon them and his ears are open to their cry. He thinks as much of each penitent sinner as if he were the only being in the universe. O penitent, for you is the working of the Lord's providence to bring you home, for you the training of his ministers that they might know how to reach your heart, for you the gifts of the Spirit upon them that they might be powerful with your conscience; yea, for you his Son, his eternal Son once bleeding on the cross, and now sitting in the highest heavens making intercession for you. I saw in Amsterdam the diamond cutting, and I noticed great wheels, a large factory and powerful engines, and all the power was made to bear upon a small stone no larger than the nail of my little finger. All that huge machinery for that little stone, because it was so precious! Methinks I see you poor insignificant sinners, who have rebelled against your God, brought back to your Father's house, and

now the whole universe is full of wheels and all those wheels are working together for your good, to make out of you a jewel fit to glisten in the Redeemer's crown. God is not represented as saying more of creation than that "it was very good," but in the work of grace he is described as singing for joy. He breaks the eternal silence and cries, "my son is found." As the philosopher when he had compelled nature to yield her secret ran through the street crying, "Eureka! Eureka! I have found it! I have found it!" so does the Father dwell on the word, "my son that was dead, is alive again, he that was lost is found." The whole of Scripture aims at the bringing back again of the Lord's banished, for this the Redeemer leaves his glory, for this the church sweeps her house and lights her candle, and when the work is done all other bliss is secondary to the surpassing joy of the Lord, of which he bids his ransomed ones partake, saying, "Enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

We also show our joy by *an alacrity of motion.* I quoted David just now. It was so with him, he danced before the ark. I cannot imagine David walking slowly before the ark, or creeping after it like a mourner at a funeral. I often notice the difference between your coming to this place and people going to other places of worship. I remark a very solemn, stately, and sombre motion in almost everybody else, but you come tripping along as if you were glad to go up to the house of the Lord; you do not regard the place of our joyous assemblies as a sort of religious prison, but as the palace and banquetting house of the great King. When any one is joyous he is sure to show it by the quickness of his motions. Hearken to the father, he says, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and let us eat and be merry." As quickly as possible he pours out sentence after sentence. There is no delay; no interval between the commands. Might he not have said, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and let us look at him awhile, and sit down and prepare him for the next step; and in an hour's time, or to-morrow, we will put a ring on his hand; and then soon we will put shoes on his feet; he is best without shoes for the present, for perhaps if he has shoes on he will run away. As to the festival, perhaps we had better rejoice over him when we see whether his repentance is genuine." No, no, no, the father's heart is too glad; he must bless his boy at once, heap on his favours, and multiply his tokens of love. When the Lord receives a sinner, he runs to meet him, he falls on his neck, he kisses him, he speaks to him, he forgives him, he justifies him, he sanctifies him, he puts him among the children, he opens the treasures of his grace to him, and all in quick succession. Within a few minutes after he has been cleansed from sin, the prodigal is robed, and adorned, and shod for service. The love of our Redeemer's heart made him say to the poor thief, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise;" he would not let him linger in pain on the cross, but carried him away to Paradise in an hour or two. Love and joy are ever quick of foot. God is slow to anger, but he is so plenteous in his mercy that his grace overflows and rushes on like a torrent when it leaps along the ravine.

Once more, the joy of the father was shown as ours often is by *open*

utterance. It is hard for a glad man to hold his tongue. What can dumb people do when they are very happy? I cannot imagine how they endure silence at such times; it must then be a terrible misfortune. When you are very happy you must tell somebody. So does this father. He pours out his joy, and the utterance is very simple. "My son was dead, and is alive again, was lost, and is found." Yet, simple as it is, it is poetry. The poetry of the Hebrews consisted in parallelism, or a repetition of the sense or a part of the words. Here are two lines which pair with each other, and make a verse of Hebrew poetry. Glad men when they speak naturally and simply always say the right thing in the very best manner, using nature's poetry, as does the father here. Note, also, that there is reiteration in his utterance. He might have been satisfied to say, "This my son was dead and is alive again." No; the fact is so sweet he must repeat it, "He was lost, and is found." Even thus we speak when we are very full of sweet content; the heart bubbleth up with a good matter, and over again and over again we rehearse our joy. When the morsel is sweet we roll it under the tongue. We cannot help it. So the Lord rejoices over sinners, and tells his joy in holy scripture in varied phrase and metaphor, and though those scriptures are simple in their style, yet they contain the very essence of poetry. The bards of the Bible stand in the first rank amongst the sons of song, God himself deigning to use poetry to utter his joy because a more prosaic manner would be all too cold and tame. Hear how he puts it: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." "I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people." We might have been left in the dark about this joy of God; we might have been coldly informed that God would save sinners, and we might never have known that he found such joy in it; but the divine joy was too great to be concealed, the great heart of God could not restrain itself, he must tell out to all the universe the delight which the exercise of mercy brought to him. It was meet that he should make merry and be glad, and therefore he did it, for nothing that is meet to be done will ever be neglected by the Lord our God.

Thus, dear friends, have I feebly spoken of the joy of God, and I want you to notice that it is a delight in which every attribute of God takes a share. Condescension ran to meet the son, love fell on his neck, grace kissed him, wisdom clothed him, truth gave him the ring, peace shod him, wisdom provided the feast, and power prepared it. No one attribute of the divine nature quarrels with the forgiveness and salvation of a sinner; not one attribute holds back from the beloved employ. Power strengthens the weak, and mercy binds up the wounded; justice smiles upon the justified sinner, for it is satisfied through the atoning blood, and truth puts forth her hand to guarantee that the promise of grace is fulfilled; immutability confirms what has been done, and omniscience looks around to see that nothing is left undone. The whole of Deity is brought to bear upon a poor worm of the dust, to lift it up and transform it into an heir of God, joint-heir with the Only Begotten. The joy of God occupies the whole of his being, so that when we think of it we may well say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name," since all that is within him is engaged to bless his saints.

This joy of the Lord should give every sinner great confidence in coming to God by Jesus Christ, for if you would be glad to be saved, he will be glad to save you; if you long to lay your head in your Father's bosom, your Father's bosom longs to have it there; if you pant to say, "I have sinned," he equally longs to say to you, by acts of love, "I forgive thee freely." If you pine to be his child in his own house once more, the door is open, and he himself is on the watch. Come and welcome, come and welcome, and no more delay.

II. I have now to speak of THE JOY OF THE SINNER. The son was glad. He did not express it in words, as far as I can see in the parable, but he felt it none the less—but all the more. Sometimes silence is discreet, and it was so in this case; at other times it is absolutely forced upon you by inability to utter the emotion, and this also was true of the prodigal. The son's heart was too full for utterance in words, but he had speaking eyes, and a speaking countenance as he looked on that dear father. As he put on the robe, the ring, and the shoes, he must have been too astonished to speak. He wept in showers that day, but the tears were not salt with grief; they were sweet tears, glittering like the dew of the morning. What would make the son glad, think you? Why, the father's love, the father's forgiveness, and restoration to his old place in the father's heart. That was the point. But then each gift would serve as a token of that love and make the joy overflow. There was *the robe* put on,—the dress of a son, and of a son well beloved and accepted. Have you noticed how the robe answered to his confession? The sentences match each other thus: "Father, I have sinned;"—"Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." Cover all his sins with Christ's righteousness; put away his sin by imputing to him the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. The robe also met his condition; he was in rags, therefore, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him," and you shall see no more of his rags. It was fit that he should be thus arrayed, in token of his restoration. He who is re-endowed with the privileges of a son should not be dressed in sordid clothes, but wear raiment suitable to his station. Moreover, as a festival was about to begin he ought to wear a festive garment. It would not be seemly for him to feast and be merry in his rags. Put the best robe on him that he may be ready to take his place at the banquet. So when the penitent comes to God he is not only covered, as to the past, by the righteousness of Christ, but he is prepared for the future blessedness which is reserved for the pardoned ones, yea, he is fitted to begin the rejoicing at once.

Then came *the ring*, a luxury rather than a necessary, except that now he was a son it was well that he should be restored to all the honours of his relationship. The signet ring in the east in former times conferred great privileges: in those days men did not sign their names, but stamped with their signet upon wax, so that the ring gave a man power over property, and made him a sort of other self to the man whose ring he wore. The father gives the son a ring, and how complete an answer was that gift to another clause of his confession. Let me read the two sentences together, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." "Put a ring on his hand." The gift precisely meets

the confession. It also tallied with his changed condition. How singular that the very hand which had been feeding swine should now wear a ring. There were no rings on his hands when they were soiled at the trough, I warrant you; but now he is a swine-feeder no longer, but an honoured son of a rich father. Slaves wear no rings. Juvenal laughs at certain freed-men because they were seen walking up and down the Via Sacra with conspicuous rings on their fingers, the emblems of their new-found liberty. The ring indicated the penitent's liberty from sin, and his enjoyment of the full privileges of his Father's house. O, beloved, the Lord will make you glad if you come to him, by putting the seal of the Holy Spirit's indwelling upon you, which is both the earnest of the inheritance and the best adornment of the hand of your practical character. You shall have a sure and honourable token, and shall know that all things are yours, whether things present, or things to come. This ring upon your finger will declare your marriage union to Christ, set forth the eternal love which the Father has fixed upon you, and be the abiding pledge of the perfect work of the Holy Ghost.

Then they put *shoes* on his feet. I suppose he had worn out his own. In the east servants do not usually wear shoes at home, and especially in the best rooms of the house. The master and the son wear the sandals, but not the servants, so that this order was an answer to the last part of the penitent's prayer, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." "No," says the father, "put shoes on his feet." In the forgiven sinner the awe which puts off its shoes is to be overmatched by the familiarity which wears the shoes which infinite love provides. The forgiven one is no longer to tremble at Sinai, but he is to come unto Mount Zion, and to have familiar intercourse with God. Thus also the restored one was shod for filial service—he could run upon his father's errands, or work in his father's fields. He had now in every way all that he could want—the robe that covered him, the ring that adorned him, and the shoe that prepared him for travel or labour.

Now ye awakened and anxious ones who are longing to draw nigh to God, I would that this description of the joy of the prodigal would induce you to come at once. Come, ye naked, and he will say, "Bring forth the best robe." Come, ye that see your natural deformity through sin, and he will adorn you with a ring of beauty. Come, ye who feel as if you could not come, for ye have bleeding, weary feet, and he will shoe you with the silver sandals of his grace. Only do but come, and you shall have such joy in your hearts as you have never dreamed of. There shall be a young heaven born within your spirit, which shall grow and increase until it comes to the fulness of bliss.

III. The time has now come for us to dwell upon THE JOY OF THE SERVANTS. They were to be merry, and they were merry, for the music and the dancing which were heard outside could not have proceeded from one person only, there must have been many to join in it, and who should these be but the servants to whom the father gave his commands? They ate, they drank, they danced, they joined in the music. There are many of us here who are the servants of our own heavenly Father; though we are his children, we delight to be his

servants. Now, whenever a sinner is saved, we have our share of joy. We have joy, first, *in the Father's joy.* They were so glad, because their lord was glad—good servants are always pleased when they see that their master is greatly gratified, and I am sure the Lord's servants are always joyous when they feel that their Lord is well pleased. That servant who went out to the elder brother, showed by his language that he was in sympathy with the father, for he pleaded with the son upon the matter; and when you are in sympathy with God, my dear brother or sister, if the Lord lets you see poor sinners saved you must and will rejoice with him. It will be to you better than finding a purse full of money, or making a great gain in business; yea, nothing in the world can give you more delight than to see some brother of yours or some child of yours made to rejoice in Christ. A mother once beautifully said, "I remember the new and strange emotions which trembled in my breast when as an infant he was first folded to my heart—my first-born child. The thrill of that moment still lingers; but when he was 'born again,' clasped in my arms a 'new creature in Christ Jesus,' my spiritual child, my son in the gospel, pardoned, justified, adopted, saved, for ever saved! Oh! it was the very depth of joy; joy unspeakable! My child was a child of God! The prayers which preceded his birth, which cradled his infancy, which girdled his youth, were answered. My son was Christ's. The weary watchings, the yearning desires, the trembling hopes of years were at rest. Our first-born son was avowedly the Lord's." May every father and mother here know just such joy by having sympathy with God.

But they had sympathy with *the son.* I am sure they rejoiced to see *him* back again, for somehow usually even bad sons have the goodwill of good servants. When young men go away, and are a great grief to their fathers, the servants often stick to them. They will say, "Well, Master John was very inconsiderate and gay, and he vexed his father a great deal, but I should like to see the poor boy back again." Especially is this true of the old servants who have been in the house since the boy was born: they never forget him. And you will find that God's old servants are always glad when they see prodigal children return; they are delighted beyond measure, because they love them after all, notwithstanding their wanderings. Sinner, with all your faults and hardness of heart we do love you, and we should be glad for your sake to see you delivered from eternal ruin and from the wrath of God which now abideth on you, and brought to rejoice in pardoned sin, and acceptance in the Beloved.

We should rejoice for the sinner's sake, but I think the servants rejoiced most of all when *they were the instruments* in the father's hand of blessing the son. Just look at this. The father said to the servants, "Bring forth the best robe." He might have gone to the wardrobe himself with a key and opened it, and brought out the robe himself, but he gave them the pleasure of doing it. When I get my orders from my Lord and Master on the Lord's-day morning to bring forth the best robe, I am delighted indeed. Nothing delights me more than to preach the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the substitutionary sacrifice of our exalted Redeemer. "Bring forth the best robe." Why, my Master, I might be content to keep out of heaven if

thou wouldst always give me this work to do—to bring forth the best robe and extol and exalt Jesus Christ in the eyes of the people. Then he said, "Put it on him." When our Lord gives us grace to do that there is more joy still. How many times I have brought forth the best robe, but could not put it on you. I have held it up, and expatiated on its excellencies, and pointed to your rags, and said what a delightful thing it would be if I could put it on you, but I could not; but when the heavenly Father, by his divine grace and the power of the Spirit, makes us the means of bringing these treasures into the possession of poor sinners, oh, what joy! I should rejoice to bring forth the ring of the Spirit's sealing work, and the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, for it is a joy to exhibit these blessings, and a greater joy still to put them upon the poor, returning wanderer. God be thanked for giving his servants so great a pleasure! I would not have dared to describe the Lord's servants as putting on the robe, the ring, and the shoes, but as he has himself done so I am rejoiced to use the Holy Spirit's own language.

How sweet was the command, "Put it on *him*." Yes, put it on the poor trembling, ragged, shivering sinner, "Put it on *him*," even on him, though he can hardly believe such mercy to be possible. "Put it on *him*?" Yes, on *him*. He who was a drunkard, a swearer, an adulterer? Yes, put it on *him*, for he repents. What joy it is when we are enabled by God's commission to throw that glorious mantle over a great sinner. As for the ring, put it on *him;* that is the beauty of it. And the shoes, put them on *him;* that they are for him is the essence of our joy—that such a sinner, and especially when he is one of our own household, should receive these gifts of grace is wonderful! It was most kind of the father to divide the labour of love. One would put on the robe, another the ring, and a third the shoes. Some of my brethren can preach Jesus Christ in his righteousness gloriously, and they put on the best robe; others seem most gifted in dwelling upon the work of the Spirit of God, and they put on the ring: while yet another class are practical divines, and they put on the shoes. I do not mind which I have to do, if I may but have a part in helping to bring to poor sinners those matchless gifts of grace, which at infinite expense the Lord has prepared for those who come back to him. How glad those were who helped to dress him I cannot tell. Meanwhile, another servant was gone off out of doors to bring in the fatted calf, and perhaps two or three were engaged in killing and dressing it, while another was lighting a fire in the kitchen, and preparing the spits for the roast. One laid the table, and another ran to the garden to bring flowers to make wreaths for the room,—I know I should have done that if I had been there. All were happy. All ready to join in the music and dancing. Those who work for the good of sinners are always the gladdest when they are saved. You who pray for them, you who teach them, you who preach to them, you who win them for Christ, you shall share their merriment.

Now, dear brethren, we are told that they "began to be merry," and according to the description it would seem that they were merry indeed, but still they only "began." I see no intimation that they ever left off. "They began to be merry," and as merriment is apt to grow

beyond all bounds when it once starts, who knows what they have come to by this time. The saints begin to be merry now, and they will never cease, but rejoice evermore. On earth all the joy we have is only beginning to be merry, it is up in heaven that they get into full swing. Here our best delight is hardly better than a neap tide at its ebb; there the joy rolls along in the majesty of a full spring tide.

"Oh what rapturous hallelujahs
In our Father's home above!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
O'er the embraces of his love!
Wondrous welcome—God's own welcome,
May the chief of sinners prove.

"Sweet melodious strains ascending,
All around a mighty flood;
Servants, friends, with joy attending—
Oh! the happiness of God!
Grace abounding, all transcending,
Through a Saviour's precious blood."

Let us begin to be merry this morning. But we cannot unless we are labouring for the salvation of others in all ways possible to us. If we have done and are doing that, let us praise and bless the Lord, and rejoice with the reclaimed ones, and let us keep the feast as Jesus would have it kept; for I hope there is no one here of the elder brethren who will be angry and refuse to go in. Let us continue to be merry as long as we live, because the lost are found and the dead are made alive. God grant you to be merry on this account world without end. Amen.

The Sunday School Teacher—A Steward

"Give an account of thy stewardship"—Luke xvi. 2.

We have heard many times in our lives, that we are all stewards to Almighty God. We hold it as a solemn truth of our religion, that the rich man is responsible for the use which he makes of his wealth; that the talented man must give an account to God of the interest which he getteth upon his talents; that every one of us, in proportion to our time and opportunities, must give an account for himself before Almighty God. But, my dear brothers and sisters, our responsibility is even deeper and greater than that of other men. We have the ordinary responsibility which falls upon all professors of religion, to give an account of all we have to God; but besides this, you and I have the extraordinary responsibilities of our official standing—you, as teachers for Christ in your classes; and others of us as preachers for him before the great congregation. The first responsibility is too heavy for any man to fulfil. Apart from divine grace, it is not possible that any man should so use all that God has given him as to be accepted at last with a "Well done thou good and faithful servant;" yet even if that were possible, it would still remain an utter impossibility for us fully to sustain the fearful weight of responsibility which rests upon us as teachers of the Word of God to our fellow immortals. Upon *our* necks there are two yokes; Sovereign grace can make them light and easy, but apart from that they will gall our shoulders; for they are, of themselves, too heavy for us to bear. Common responsibility is as Solomon's whip; but extraordinary responsibility derived from official standing, when not regarded, will be as the scorpion of Rehoboam, its little finger shall be thicker than its father's loins. Woe unto the watchman who warns them not; woe unto the minister who fails to teach the truth; woe unto the Sabbath-school teacher who is unfaithful to his trust. Now, let us try to stir one another up, upon this seriously important matter. You will pray for me while I preach, that I may utter some things that may do good to all now present, and I will labour that God may, in answer to your prayers, give me words and thoughts which shall be blessed to you.

Now, first, let me show *the meaning of our being stewards*; then let us consider *what kind of account we shall have to give*; and lastly, let us notice *the days of reckoning when we* OUGHT *to cast up our account, and the days of reckoning when we* MUST *give in our account.*

I. First, then, THE STEWARD—WHAT IS HE?

In the first place, the steward is a *servant.* He is one of the greatest of servants, but he is only a servant. Perhaps he is the bailiff of a farm, and looks, to all intents and purposes, like a country farmer: he rides over his master's estate, and has many men under him; still he is only a servant, he is under authority, he is only a steward. Perhaps he is steward in the house of some gentleman, who employs him to see after the whole of his establishment, in order that he may be free from cares. In that capacity he is himself a master, but still he is a servant; for

he has one over him. Let him be as proud as he pleases, he has little to be proud of, for the only rank he holds in life, is the rank of a servant. Now, the minister, and the Sunday-school teacher specially stand in the rank of servants. Why, we are none of us our own masters; we are not independent gentlemen, who may do as we please; our classes are not our own farms, which we may till in our own manner, and neglect if we please, out of which we may produce any harvest, or none at all, at our own discretion. No, we are nothing better than stewards, and we are to labour for our Master in heaven. What a strange thing it is to see a minister or a teacher giving himself fine airs, as if he were everybody in the world, and might do as he pleased. Is it not an anomaly? How is he to talk about the sacrifices that he makes, when he is spending only his master's property? How is he to boast about the time which he expends, when his time is not his own? It is all his Master's. He is a servant, and therefore, do he what he may, he only discharges the duty for which he is well rewarded. He has no reason to be proud, or to lord it over others, for whatever his power among them may be, he is himself neither more nor less than a servant. Let each of us try to recollect that henceforth "I am only a servant." If a superintendent puts a teacher to a class which she does not like, she will recollect that she is a *servant*. She does not allow her servants at home to stand up and say, they are not going to do scullery-work but will only wait at table; they are servants, and must do as they are bidden; and if we felt that we were servants, we should not object to do what we are told for Christ's sake: though we would not do it at the dictation of men, yet for Christ's sake we do it as unto the Lord. We do not suppose that our servants will come to us at night, and expect us to say to them, "You have done your work very well to-day;" we do not imagine that they will look for constant commendation. They are servants, and when they get their wages, that is their encomium on their work. They may judge they are worth their money, or else we should not keep them. When you do your work for Jesus, recollect you are only a servant. Do not expect always to have that encouragement, which some people are constantly crying after. If you get encouragement from your pastor, from other teachers, from your friends, be thankful; but if you do not get it, go on with your work notwithstanding. You are a servant, and when you receive your reward, that is of grace, and not of debt, then you will have the highest encomium that can be passed upon you, the plaudit of your Lord, and eternal glory with him whose you are, and whom you desire to serve.

But still while the steward is a servant, he is an *honourable one*. It does not do for the other servants in the house to tell him that he is a servant. He will not endure that: he knows it, and feels it; he desires to act and work as such, but at the same time, he is an honoured servant. Now, those who serve Christ in the office of teaching, are honourable men and women. I remember to have heard a very unseemly discussion between two persons, as to whether the minister was not superior to the Sabbath-school teacher. It reminded me of that talk of the disciples, as to who among them was the greatest. Why, we are all of us "the least," if we feel aright, and though we must each of us exalt our office as God hath given it to us, yet, I see not anywhere in the Bible, anything that should lead me to believe that the office of the preacher is more honourable than that of the teacher. It seems to me, that every Sunday-school teacher has a right to put "Reverend" before his name as much as I have, or if not, if he discharges his trust he certainly is a "Right Honourable." He teaches his congregation and preaches to his class. I may preach to more, and he to less, but still he is doing the same work, though in a smaller sphere. I am sure I can sympathise with Mr. Carey, when he said of his son Felix, who left the missionary work to become an ambassador, "Felix has drivelled into an ambassador;" meaning to say, that he was once a great person as a missionary, but that he had afterwards accepted a comparatively insignificant office. So I think we may say of the Sabbath-school teacher, if he gives up his work because he cannot attend to it, on account of his enlarged business, he drivels into a rich merchant. If he forsakes his teaching because he finds there is so much else to do, he drivels into something less than he was before; with one exception, if he is obliged to give up to attend to his own family, and makes that family his Sabbath-school class, there is no drivelling there; he stands in the same position as he did before. I say they who teach, they who seek to pluck souls as brands from the burning, are to be considered as honoured persons, second far to him from whom they received their commission; but still in some sweet sense lifted up to become fellows with him, for

he calls them his brethren and his friends. "The servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends, for all things I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Only one more thought here. The steward is also a servant *who has very great responsibility attached to his position.* A sense of responsibility seems to a right man always a weighty thing. To do a thing where there is no responsibility involved at all, is a very slight matter, and hence we find in ordinary affairs that the labour which involves no trust is but poorly paid. But where there is a large amount of trust reposed the labour is paid in proportion. Now the work of the Sabbath-school teacher is one of the most responsible in the world. It has sometimes staggered me to think how greatly God trusts you and me. You remember the story of the prodigal. It finds a counterpart in each of us, who after long wandering in sin have come home to Jesus. I sometimes think that a prudent father, when the prodigal was restored to his house, would receive him to his heart, would press him to his bosom, and give him a share of all his wealth, but would be very slow to trust him in any matter of responsibility. The next market-day the old gentlemen would say, "Now John I love you with all my heart, but you know you ran away once, and spent your living riotously; I must send your elder brother to market; I cannot trust you with my purse: I love you; I have totally forgiven you, at the same time I cannot yet rely upon you." Why does not God say so to us? Instead of that, when he takes poor prodigals to his heart, he trusts us with his most precious jewels, he trusts us with immortal souls. He permits us to be the means of seeking his lost sheep, and then allows us to feed the lambs after they are gathered. He puts the prodigal into the most important station, and hath confidence in him. Then my brethren and sisters, seeing he hath been gracious enough to repose confidence in such unworthy persons, shall we deceive him? Oh no; let us earnestly labour as stewards that every part of the estate committed to us shall be found in good order when our Master comes; that every jot and tittle of our account shall be found correct when he sums it up in the great day of the audit before his throne. Our office is a very, very solemn one. Some think little of it. Some take it upon themselves very lightly. Giddy youths are enticed into the school and not rendered more sober by their connection with it. Let such depart from us. We want none but those who are sober, none but those who solemnly weigh what they are doing, and who enter upon the work as a matter involving life or death; not as a trivial affair which concerns the interests of time, but an awfully solemn thing which even an angel would be incapable of performing, unless he had the abundant assistance of God the Holy Spirit. I have thus endeavoured very simply to set forth the idea couched in the word "stewardship." We are servants highly honoured, very responsible, and much trusted.

II. And now, THE ACCOUNT—"Give an account of thy stewardship." Let us briefly think of this giving an account of our stewardship.

Let us first notice that when we shall come to give an account of our stewardship before God, that account must be given in *personally*, by every one of us. While we are here, we talk in the mass; but when we come before God, we shall have to speak as individuals. You hear persons boasting about "*our* Sabbath-school." Many persons are wicked enough to call the Sabbath-school "their school," when they never see it by the year together. They say, "I hope *our* school is flourishing," when they never subscribe a halfpenny, when they never give the teachers a word of encouragement, or even a smile, and do not know how many children the school contains. Yet they call it theirs. Thieves that they are, taking to themselves that which does not belong to them! Well, but we, in our measure, make the same mistake. As a ministry, we often talk of the doings of the "body," and what wonders have been done by the "denomination." Now, let us recollect, when we come before God, there will be no judging us in denominations, no dealing with us in schools and in churches, but the account must be given for each one by himself. So, then, thou that hast the infant class, thou wilt have to give thine own account. It was but the other day thou wast finding fault with the conduct of the senior class, and thou wast told then to look at home. Conscience told thee so. But at last, when thou shalt have to stand before God, thou wilt have no account to give of the senior class, but of that infant class committed to thee. And you, my sister, you have been seven or eight years a teacher—you must give an account for yourself, not for that other teacher of another class, of

whom you have often boasted, because she has been the means of bringing six or seven children to Christ lately. Remember, her six won't be put with your none at all, in order to make the total at the year's end look respectable; but there will stand your great blank at the end of your labours, and there will remain the dark mark for your negligence, for your unpunctuality, your carelessness in your class, without the relief of the bright side of the diligent teacher's success. You must be judged each of you for yourself, not in parties, but one by one. This makes it terrible work, for a man to be looked at all alone. I have known people who could not bear to stand up in a pulpit; the very fact of so many eyes looking upon them seemed so horrible; but how will it be when we must stand up and hear our hearts read by the all-searching eye of God, and when the whole of our career in the offices which we now hold will be published before the sun, and that, I repeat it, without the salvo of the success of others, without any addition to our labours derived from the diligence of other teachers? Come, Mr. Steward, what is your account? Not that one, sir, not that one; *your* account. "Lord, I have brought in the account of the Sunday-school books." "No, not that; the account of *your own* class?" "Well, my Master, I have brought in the account of the class for the last twenty-five years, showing how many were converted." "No, not that; the account of *your own class while you were its teacher*." "Well, I have brought in the account of the class during the time I was teacher with So-and-so." "No, not that; the account of the class while you were the teacher of it *alone;* the account of how you taught, what you taught, how you prayed, how earnestly you laboured, how diligently you studied, and what you sought to do for Christ." Not the addenda of the other teacher who helped you in another part of the duty, but your own personal account alone must be brought in before God. "Give an account of *thy* stewardship." Putting it in this light, what account will some of you give in at the last and great day? Just let me stop a minute to charge your memories. What kind of account will it be? I trust a very large number here can humbly in their hearts say, "I have done but little, but I did *that* sincerely and prayerfully; may God accept it through Jesus Christ!" But I fear there are some others, who, if they are true to their consciences, will say, "I have done but little; I did that little carelessly; I did it without prayer; I did it without the help of the Holy Spirit." Then, my brother and sister, I hope you will add after that, "Oh, my God, forgive me, and help me from this good hour to be diligent in this divine business, fervent in my spirit, serving the Lord." And may God bless you in that prayer! Make no resolve, but offer a prayer which is better far; and may you be heard in heaven, the dwelling-place of God.

And note again, that while this account must be personal it must be *exact.* You will not, when you present your account before God, present the gross total, but every separate item. When thou givest in thine account of thy stewardship, it will be thus. Thou hadst so many children. What didst thou say to this child, and to this, and to this, and to the other? How often didst thou pray for that child with his bitter temper; for that child with his unbending obstinacy; for that child with its quickness, and its sweet affection; for that child, that sulky one; for that child, the headstrong, vicious one, that had learned all the evils of the street, and seemed to taint others? What didst thou do for each one of these? How didst thou labour for the conversion of every one? And to make the account still more particular, it will run thus—What didst thou do for each child on each Sabbath? Thou heardest one child utter an ill word: didst thou reprove it? Thou sawest another child oppress a little one: didst thou deliver the less out of his hand and reprove him, and teach both children to love each other? Didst thou notice the follies of each, and strive to understand the temperament of each, so that thou shouldest fit thy discourse or thy prayer to each? Didst thou travail in birth for the conversion of each one? Didst thou agonise in prayer with God, and then didst thou agonise in exhortation with them, beseeching them to be reconciled to Christ? I believe the account will be far more minute than this, when God shall come to try our hearts and reins as well as our works and ways. My poor way of putting it does but becloud the truth which I seek to bring forth, but nevertheless so shall it be; a special and exact account shall be given. And then there shall be an account given, for every opportunity; not only for every child, but for every opportunity of doing good to the child. Did you avail yourself of that afternoon, when the child was in a peculiarly solemn frame because his little brother lay at home dead? Did you seek to send the arrows home when providence had made

a wound in his little heart because he had lost his dear mother? Did you seek to turn every event which occurred in the school to account, whether it was joyous or the reverse? God gave you the opportunity, and he will at last ask you what you did with it. We shall many of us make but a sorry account, for we have neglected much that we ought to have done; and the general confession must be ours as teachers, "We have done those things which we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things which we ought to have done."

And then remember, again, the account will be exact as to everything that we did. We shall not only be examined as to how we addressed the school; we may have had peculiar gifts for that, and we may have done well; it will be, "How did you address your own class?" and not that alone, but "How did you study the lessons?" If thou hadst no time it will not be required of thee to do what thou couldst not do; but if thou hadst much leisure how didst thou spend it? Was it for thy children, for thy Master's good, that thou mightest find polished shafts to shoot forth from thy bow, that God might bless thee, by giving thee strength to send them home into the heart? And then, what didst thou do in thy closet? Wast thou cold and careless there? Were thy children forgotten, or didst thou bring them on thy heart, and in thine arms, and with tears and cries commend them to Christ? Ah, Sunday-school teachers, your closet shall be turned into the open air one day, and the contents of your secret chambers be published before the sun. Oh, ye whose cobwebbed closets witness against you; oh, ye against whom the beam out of the wall exclaimeth because your voice has not been heard there, against whom the very floor might bear witness, because it hath never felt the weight of your knees, how will you stand this searching test? How will you endure this day of burning, when God shall try you for everything you did, and everything you did not do which you ought to have done, in connection with the work of teaching your children? The account must be exact and precise, as well as personal. I shall not stop to enlarge upon that; your own conscience and judgment can enlarge upon it at home.

Now, remember, once again, that the account must be *complete*. You will not be allowed to leave out something, you will not be allowed to add anything. Perhaps some of you would like to begin with to-morrow, or next Sabbath-day, and strike out the past. No, Sunday-school teacher, when God says, "Give an account of thy stewardship," you will have to begin with the day when you first were a teacher. Ah, my God, how many there are who profess to preach the Word, who might well beg that thou wouldest let many a year of their ministry be buried in forgetfulness! Ah, might not some of us fall upon our knees and say, "Lord, let me give account of my diligent years, not of my idle years?" But we must begin with our ordination, we must end with our death; and you must begin with the first hour when you sat down in your class, and you must end when life ends, and not till then. Does not this put a very solemn aspect upon your account, some of you? You are always saying, "I will be better to-morrow." Will that blot out yesterday? "I must be more diligent in future." Will that redeem the lost opportunities which have departed in the years gone by? No; if you have loitered long, and lingered much, you will find the hardest running of to-day will not make up for the loitering of yesterday. There have been some men who, after spending many years in sin, have been doubly diligent for Christ afterwards, but they have always felt that they have only done the day's work in the day, and they mourned over those years which the locusts had eaten, as gone beyond recall. Oh! catch the moments as they fly, Sabbath-school teachers; use the days as they come. Do not be talking about making up for the badness of the first part of the account by the brilliant character of the conclusion; you cannot do it, you must give an account for each day separately, for each year by itself; and do what you may to retrieve your losses, the losses still stand upon the book, and the Master will say, at last, "How came these here?" And, though they are all covered up in Sovereign grace, if thou believest in Christ Jesus, yet thou wouldest not wish to have any the more stains for that. Because Christ hath washed thee, thou dost not desire to make thyself filthy; because he hath atoned, thou dost not desire to commit sin. No, live, my brothers and sisters, as Sunday-school teachers should live. Live as if your own salvation depended upon the strictness of your fulfilling your duty; and yet recollect your salvation does not depend upon that, but on your personal interest in the everlasting covenant, and in the all-prevailing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Israel's strength and Redeemer.

III. And now, though there are many other things I might say, I fear lest I might weary you, therefore, let me notice some occasions when it will be WELL for you all to give an account of your stewardship; and then notice when you MUST give an account of it.

You know there is a proverb, that "short reckonings make long friends," and a very true proverb it is. A man will always be at friendship with his conscience as long as he makes short reckonings with it. It was a good rule of the old Puritans, that of making frank and full confession of sin every night; not to leave a week's sin to be confessed on Saturday night, or Sabbath morning, but to recall the failures, imperfections, and mistakes of the day, in order that we might learn from one day of failure how to achieve the victory on the morrow, and that washing ourselves daily from our sins we might preserve the purity and whiteness of our garments. Brothers and sisters, do the same; make short reckonings. And it will be well for you every Sabbath evening, or at any other time, if so it pleaseth you, to make a reckoning of what you do on the Sabbath. I do not say this in order that you may be encouraged in any self-righteous congratulation that you have done well; because, if you make your reckoning correct, you will never have much cause to congratulate yourself, but always cause to mourn that you did your duty so ill compared with what you ought to have done. When the Sabbath is over, and you have been twice to the house of God to teach your class, just sit down and try to recollect what were the points in which you failed. Perhaps you exhibited a hasty temper; you spoke to a boy too sharply when he was a little rebellious. Perhaps you were too complacent; you saw sin committed, and ought to have reproved it, and you did not do so. If you find out your own failing, that is half the way to a cure. Next Sabbath you can try and set it right.

Then, there are times which Providence puts in your way, which will be excellent seasons for reckoning. For instance, every time a boy or girl leaves the school, there is an opportunity afforded you of thinking to yourselves, "Well, how did I deal with Betsy? How did I treat John? Did I give William such teaching as will help him in his future life, to maintain integrity in the midst of temptation, and preserve righteousness when he shall be subjected to imminent perils? How did I teach the girl? Did I so teach her that she will know her duty when she goes into the world? Did I strive with all my might to lead her to the foot of the cross?" There are many solemn questions which you may put concerning the child. And when you meet with any of them grown up in after years, you will find that a very proper season for giving an account of your stewardship to your conscience, by seeing whether you really did with that person, when a child, as you could have desired.

Then, there is a peculiar time for casting up accounts when a child dies. Ah! what a host of thoughts cluster around the dying-bed of a child whom we have taught. Next to the father and the mother, I should think the Sabbath-school teacher will take the most interest in the dying one. You will recollect, "There lies withering the flower which my hand hath watered; there is an immortal soul about to pass the portals of eternity, whom I have taught. O God, have I taught this dying child the truth, or have I deceived him! Have I dealt faithfully with him? Have I told him of his ruin? Have I set before him how he was fallen in Adam and depraved in himself? Have I told him about the great redemption of Christ? Have I shown him the necessity of regeneration and the work of the Holy Spirit? or have I amused him with tales about the historical parts of the Bible, and pieces of morality, and kept back the weightier matters of the law? Can I put my hand into his dying hand, and silently lifting my heart to heaven, can I say, 'O God thou knowest I am clear of his blood?'" Ah! that is a thing that stings the minister often—when he recollects that any of his congregation are dying. When I stand sometimes by the dying-bed of any of the ungodly in my congregation, it bring many a fearful thought to me. Have I been as earnest as I ought to have been? Did I cry to this man, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, stay not in all the plain, flee to the mountain? Did I pray for him, weep over him, tell him of his sin, preach Christ simply, plainly, boldly, to him? Was there not an occasion when I used lightness when I ought to have been solemn? Might there not have been a season when I uttered something by mistake, which may have been a pillow for the armhole of his conscience on which he might rest? Have not I helped to smooth his path to hell, instead of putting blocks in his way, and chains across his path that he might be turned out of it and led to seek the Saviour?" Ah! while we know that salvation is all of grace let none of us imagine

we are free from the blood of souls, unless we warn them with diligence, unless we preach with faithfulness; for this same Bible which tells me that Christ shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, tells me that if I warn them not, their blood, if they perish, shall be required at my hand.

But now, teacher, let me tell you an occasion when you *must* give in your account. You may put off all these seasons if you like; you may live as carelessly as you please, but if you have a particle of heart in you, you will have to give an account when you are sick, and cannot go to your class. If your conscience is worth having—which some people's consciences are not, for they are dead and seared—if your conscience is an awakened one, when you are put out of your work, you will begin to think how you did it. You should read the letters of that holy man Rutherford. If ever there was a man who preached the gospel sweetly and with divine unction, I should think it must have been he; and yet when he was shut up in Aberdeen, and could not get out to his much-loved flock, he began to say, "Ah, if the Lord will let me go out to preach again, I will never be such a dull drone as I was wont to be. I will preach with tears in mine eyes, so that the people may be comforted, and the sinners converted." Perhaps when you are lying ill in your bed-room, little Jane comes to see you, and says, "I hope you will soon get well, teacher;" or William, or Thomas calls and enquires about you every Sunday afternoon, and asks the servant to give his love to you, and hopes that teacher will soon come back again. Then is the time when I know you will be sure to cast up your account. You will say, "Ah, when I get back to my class, I won't teach them as I used to do; I will study my lesson more, I will pray more. I won't be so hot or so fast with them as I was wont to be. I will bear with their ill manners. Ah, if my Master will give me, like Hezekiah, another fifteen years of labour, and will give me more grace, I will strive to be better." You will be sure to cast up your accounts when you get sick.

But if you do not do it then, I will tell you when you must; that is when you come *to die*. What a dreadful thing it must be to be an unfaithful preacher on a dying-bed. (Oh that I may be saved from that!) To be upon one's bed when life is over; to have had great opportunities, mighty congregations, and to have been so diligent about something else as to have neglected to preach the full and free gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! methinks as I lie in my bed a-dying, I should see spectres and grim things in the room. One would come and stare upon me and say, "Ah! you are dying. Remember how many times I sat in the front of the gallery, and listened to you, but you never once told me to escape from the wrath to come; you were talking to me about something I did not understand; but the simple matter of the gospel you never preached to me, and I died in doubt and trembling. And now you are coming to me to the hell which I have inherited because you were unfaithful." And when in our grey and dying age we see the generations which have grown up around our pulpits, we shall think of them all. We shall think of the time when as striplings we first began to preach; we shall recollect the youths that then crowded, then the men, and then the grey heads that passed away. And methinks as they come on in grim procession, they will everyone leave a fresh curse upon our conscience because we were unfaithful. The death-bed of a man who has murdered his fellows, of some grim tyrant who has let the bloodhounds of war loose upon mankind, must be an awful thing. When the soldier, and the soldier's widow, and the murdered man of peace rise up before him; when the smoke of devastated countries seems to blow into his eyes and make them sore and red; when the blood of men hangs on his conscience like a great red pall; when bloody murder, the grim chamberlain, draws red curtains round his bed, and when he begins to approach the last end where the murderer must inherit his dreary doom, it must be a fearful time indeed. But, methinks to have murdered souls must be more awful still—to have distributed poison to children instead of bread, to have given them stones when they asked us for right food, to have taught them error when we ought to have taught them the truth as it is in Jesus, or to have spoken to them with cold listlessness when earnestness was needed. Oh, how your children seem to curse you, when you lie there and have been unfaithful to your charge. Yes, you will have to cast up your account then; and let me tell you, though your hope must all be fixed on Jesus, and that must be the consolation of your life and death, yet it will be very sweet to remember when you come to die, that you have been successful in winning souls to Christ. Ah! that will bring a little life into the cheek of the consumptive teacher, who sickens young when you remind her that there was a little girl who, a year

before she was taken ill, kissed her hand, and said, "Good bye, teacher, we shall meet in heaven. Do not you recollect, teacher, telling me the story of Jesus on the cross, and taking me home one Sunday afternoon, and putting your arms around my neck, and kneeling down and praying that God would bless me? Oh, my teacher, that brought me to Jesus." Yes, teacher, when you are lying on your bed, pale and consumptive, you will recollect that there is one up there beside your Saviour who will receive you into eternal habitations—that young spirit who has gone before you, who by your means was emancipated from the wickedness and bondage of a sinful world. Happy is the teacher who has the hope of meeting a whole band of such in heaven. Such a thought often cheers me. Let the world say what it will, I know when I die there is many a spirit that will think of me in after years as the man who preached the gospel to him; many a drunkard brought to Jesus, and many a harlot reclaimed. And to the teacher it must be the same to think that when he claps his wings and mounts from this lower valley of earth to heaven, he will see a bright spirit coming down to meet him, and he will hear the Spirit saying—

"Sister spirit, come away."

And when he opens his eyes, he will see that the song came from the lips of one to whom he had been blessed as the means of conversion. Happy you who shall be welcomed at the gates of Paradise by your spiritual sons and daughters, and who shall have beside your Master's welcome, the welcome of those whom he hath given you to be jewels in your crown of glory for ever and ever.

Now to conclude. We must all give an account to God in the day of judgment. That is the thing which makes death so terrible. Oh, Death, if thou wert all, what art thou but a pinch, and all is over! But after Death the judgment. This is the sting of the dragon to the ungodly. The last great day is come. The books are opened—men, women, and children are assembled. Many have come, and some on the right, and some on the left, have already heard the sentence. It is now your turn. Teacher! what account will you render? In the first place, are you in Christ yourself? or have you taught to others what you did not know yourself? Have I any such here? Doubtless, I have; for alas! there are many such in our schools. Oh, my friend, what wilt thou say when the Master, opening the book, shall ask thee, "What hadst thou to do, to declare my statutes?" Will you look at him and say, "Lord I taught in thy schools, and thou hast eaten and drunk in our streets." If you should say so, he will say, "Verily, I never knew you; depart from me ye cursed." Then, what have you to say with regard to your schools—for although our state at last will really be settled according to our interest in Christ, you will be *judged* by your works, as evidences. The Scripture always says that we are to be judged according to our works. Well, then, the book is opened. You hear your own name read, and you hear that one brief sentence—"Inasmuch as thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee a ruler over many things—enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" Oh, heaven of heavens! and is this the reward of the little trouble of teaching a few children? Oh, Master, thou givest ingots of gold for our grains of dust—our fragments of service thou rewardest with crowns and kingdoms! But he turns to others, and to you he says, "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto me. Depart from me into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." Which of these two shall be said to *me?* Which of these two shall be said to *you?* Oh! as in God's sight I charge you by him who is the Judge of quick and dead, by the swiftness of his chariot-wheels which now are bringing him here, by the solemnity of his awful tribunal, by that sentence which shall never be reversed, judge yourselves, for then ye shall not be judged. Give an account of your stewardship to your conscience, and to your God. Confess your sins, seek his help, and begin from this hour, by his Holy Spirit, to undertake his work afresh; so shall ye stand before his face, clothed in the righteousness of your Redeemer and washed in his blood. Though not boasting in your works you shall be able to stand accepted in him, and your works shall follow when you rise from your labours, and you shall be among the blessed that die in the Lord.

The Bridgeless Gulf

"Beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence"—Luke xvi. 26.

FOR the last few months I have been led to blow the silver trumpet, sounding forth the love and mercy of our God in Christ. Many times in your hearing I have preached a full Christ for empty sinners, and have set forth the freeness and graciousness of the divine proclamation which in the gospel is made to the chief of sinners. I have not, concerning that point, shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God. But I feel that I must now blow a blast upon the rough ram's horn, for sometimes our congregations need to be reminded of the law and terrors of God, and of the judgment to come; our experience is, that the preaching of judgment is greatly blessed of God; we have remarked that a very large number of conversions have occurred under those sermons in which the declaration of God's wrath against all iniquity has been the most plain and solemn. A thunder-storm clears the air; there are pestilences which would gather beneath the wings of calm which can only be purged away by the lightning flash. When God sends his servant with heavy tidings, his message of alarm cleanses the spiritual atmosphere, and kills the sloth, pride, indifference, and lethargy, which otherwise might fall upon the people. As the sharp needle prepares the way for the thread, so the piercing law makes a way for the bright silver thread of divine grace. The lancet is quite as needful as the healing balm. The law is our pedagogue to bring us to Christ; like the old Greek pedagogue who led the boy to school, so the law leads us to Christ, who teaches and instructs us, and makes us wise unto salvation. Those who preached the law, as well as the gospel, in the Puritanic times, were the most fruitful soul-winners. We find our blessed Lord and Master, whose heart was overflowing with compassion, and whose very nature was love, often dwelling upon the wrath to come; and indeed

his utterances are more telling and terrible than the most burning threatening from the lips of thundering seers of old. God grant that this morning, the effect which so anxiously I desire, may follow from that burden of the Lord which now weighs so heavily upon me. May the Master gather out this day a seed unto himself, who shall be saved from the wrath to come, and be to all eternity the reward of the Redeemer's travail. Lift up your hearts to God, ye that know him and have power with him, and ask that now the divine Spirit may work mightily, that hearts may be broken and sinners led to Jesus.

"Beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed." Human ingenuity has done very much to bridge great gulfs. Scarcely has the world afforded a river so wide that its floods could not be overleaped; or a torrent so furious that it could not be made to pass under the yoke. High above the foam of Columbia's glorious cataract, man has hung aloft his slender but substantial road of iron, and the shriek of the locomotive is heard above the roar of Niagara. This very week I saw the first chains which span the deep rift through which the Bristol Avon finds its way at Clifton; man has thrown his suspension bridge across the chasm, and men will soon travel where only that which hath wings could a little while ago have found a way. There is, however, one gulf which no human skill or engineering ever shall be able to bridge; there is one chasm which no wing shall ever be able to cross; it is the gulf which divides the world of joy in which the righteous triumph, from that land of sorrow in which the wicked feel the smart of Jehovah's sword. Whatever other arguments there may be why the righteous should have no communion with the wicked in a future state, beside all these other things, any one of which is enough and sufficient of itself, there is a great gulf fixed, so that there can be no passage from the one world to the other.

I. In trying solemnly to speak upon this matter, I shall commence with this—THERE IS NO PASSAGE FROM HEAVEN TO HELL—"They which would pass from hence to you, cannot." Glorified saints cannot visit the prison-house of lost sinners. Long enough were the righteous mingled with the wicked; sufficient was the evil time in which the wheat was choked with the tares; quite long enough was the period in which the chaff laid upon the same floor, side by side with the wheat. Patience had its perfect work. They did both grow together until the time of the harvest; it is not necessary now that harvest has come, that they should lie together any longer. It were inconsistent with the perfect joy and the beatific state of the righteous, with its perfect calm and purity, that sin should be admitted into their midst, or that they should be permitted to find companionships in the abodes of evil. It were not glorious to the Lord Jesus Christ, that they should cease from beholding his beauties and adoring his person, in order to succour

his enemies, and comfort his desperate foes. Shall the courtiers of heaven become traitors to their King, that they may relieve his implacable adversaries? Shall the princes of the blood imperial, who wear eternal coronets, lay aside their robes of honour, to become menial servants to the damned in hell, who would not, when Christ was preached to them, bow the knee and kiss the Son? This must not and cannot be. Besides, the decree of God, like a great mountain of brass, has for ever shut the righteous in with holiness, with happiness, with God, and they cannot, if they would, must not, cross the great gulf which divides them from the world of the wicked.

It follows that *the most earnest and assiduous preacher* must then renounce all hope of converting sinners. God has raised up some apostolic spirits, whose presence in a nation is like the rising of the sun; darkness flies before them, and the light of salvation streams from them to tens of thousands. When they lift up their hands to preach, God gives them power to shake the gates of hell, and when they bend the knee to pray, they unlock the gates of heaven. Men like Baxter with bursting hearts of love, or Joseph Alleine with glowing tongue, or Whitfield with seraph's fire, or Wesley with cherub's zeal; these are the men who bless their age and are most truly great. These men can go to the borders of the earth if they will; their commission is co-extensive with the human race—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the ends of the world." These men are never so happy as when they are preaching. Woe is unto them if they preach not the gospel, and when they preach it and God helps them, they are like Elihu, refreshed by the effort. They were born to preach the gospel and to win sinners to Christ, and they are never content except they are fulfilling their high commission. But they must cease from their labours soon, for in heaven they are not needed, and from hell they are excluded. O sinner, even our voice, feeble though it be, may win you to Jesus now; but if you die impenitent, it can never woo you again to a Saviour. *Now* is my time to preach to you, and set open mercy's door before you, but *then* I can never warn you, nor invite you; never again depict the agonies of my Lord and Master and endeavour to attract you by the story of his love, his dying, bleeding love. No, it will be all over then. "They rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." They must bring their sheaves with them, for they cannot return into another field to sow, nor journey into other broad acres to reap. Burning as their hearts will still be with divine love, they will have to exercise it in another way. Their passionate longings for God's glory will find other channels in which to flow. They will bow their heads and adore him day and night, but they can no longer serve him in gospel ministry. The ambassador rolls up his commission for God has run up the black flag of damnation, and hangs out

no more signals of peace. Poor sinner, fain would I win thee now, for it is now or never with thee and me.

The efforts of the most importunate visitor, the most earnest friend, must cease with death. Some of you have friends who can get nearer to your heart than I can. You can afford sometimes to forget my poor words and go your way to sin again; but you have a sister, and when she pleads with you, you do feel it; you have one loving friend, and when he speaks to you you cannot be deaf; your conscience has often been impressed by him, and sometimes through him the strivings of the Spirit have been very mighty with your soul. I love, my brethren and sisters, to see you earnest for the souls of others. God may give *you* some souls whom he will never give to me, and so long as they be but saved, though I have a holy covetousness and earnestly desire to bring many to Christ, yet I will as unfeignedly rejoice in their salvation by your instrumentality as if it had been accomplished by my own. Go and labour with all your might. Tell what Christ has done for you. With pleading, loving accents, beseech them to be reconciled to God. But oh! remember you can only do that in *this* life, for when the gates are shut, you are shut in for your reward, and all the world is shut out from your efforts. O my hearer, dost thou hear this? not only will there be no public congregations, no Sabbaths, no houses of prayer, but there shall be no private messengers, no earnest Christians who shall privately seek thy soul's good. What sayest thou to this? Does not this give an awful value to those tender words of importunate love? Turn thee at the gentle rebuke, for otherwise thou shalt be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy.

Those who are nearest and dearest must be divided from you, if you perish in your sins. A mother can put her arms about her child's neck and pray for it here; she may affectionately exhort her son to seek peace with God now; she may earnestly and incessantly follow him with her holy entreaties, but she can never come to him from the realms of glory if once he is lost. "They that would come from us to you cannot." Do ye hear it, young man? Those glistening eyes of a mother's love shall never weep again for you. That touching voice which sometimes awoke the echoes of your heart, shall never plead again. O ungodly woman, thou shalt never see thy godly child. Father, is it that daughter you are thinking of who loved and feared God in childhood and was taken from you? Did she say to you when she was dying, "Follow me to heaven, my Father?" You have heard her voice for the last time; that child will never see her father more unless he turns from his evil ways. Methinks if she could be in heaven what she was on earth, she would fling her arms about your neck and seek to draw you to the glorious throne of the Most High; but oh! it cannot be. A just God condemns the impenitent sinner, and just men assent to the Divine sentence. See

then, O ye ungodly ones that are present to-day, you often think our company a great nuisance, and perhaps while I am preaching, my alarming words annoy you. Ah, we shall not annoy you long. Does your mother tease you when she bids you seek the Lord? She will not tease you long. When I bring home the judgment to come, is the subject obnoxious to you? I shall not ask your patience long. We shall be separated; if you go your way and follow after sin and wrath, there will come a dividing time, and O let me say to you, you would give worlds if you had them; you would give them if they were solid diamonds, to hear again the voice which now fatigues you, and to listen once more to those plaintive invitations which vex you and spoil your mirth. Ah, how would you bless God if he would let you come back again an have once more those Sabbaths which were so dull and dreary, and permit you to go up once more to the house of God which now perhaps is like a prison-house to your vain and frivolous spirits. O sirs, I say ye may well have patience with us for a little time and bear with our importunities, for we shall not plague you much longer. We beseech you to come to Jesus; we would pluck you by your garments and beseech you to flee from the wrath to come; forgive us for being thus in earnest, for even if we should fail with you, you will soon escape the importunities of our love. A few short months of mortal life, and then you will be far away from all religious discourses and all spiritual talk of things to come; you will be in your own company, but I warn you this will yield you little enough content.

Dear friends, how earnest this ought to make the people of God to work while it is called to-day. If this is our only time for doing good, let us do good while we can. I hear people sometimes say, "Mr. So-and-so does too much; he works too hard." Oh! we none of us do half enough. Do not talk about working too hard for Jesus Christ, the thing is impossible. Are souls perishing, and shall I sleep? My idle, lazy flesh, shalt thou keep me still while men are dying and hell is filling? Brethren and sisters, let us be lukewarm no longer. If God makes us lights in the world, let us spend ourselves as a candle does, which consumes itself by shining. As the poor work girl, who has but one light, works with desperate pace because that will soon be burned out, so let us be instant in season and out of season, watching, praying labouring for the souls of men. We are not earnest enough about immortal souls. If we had but a view of the shortness of life, the fleeting character of time, and the terrors of eternal wrath; if we could but see lost souls, and understand their unutterable woe, we should shake ourselves from the dust, and go forth to work while it is called to-day.

II. As we cannot go from heaven to hell, so the text assures us, "NEITHER CAN THEY COME TO US THAT WOULD COME FROM THENCE."

The lost spirits in hell are shut in for ever. I see the angel standing at that iron door; I hear the awful key as it grates among the tremendous wards, and when that gate is closed, he hurls the key into the abyss of oblivion, and the captives are fast immured, bound in fetters which will never break, in chains which never rust. The sinner cannot come to heaven for a multitude of reasons. Among the rest, these. First, *his own character* forbids it. As a man lives and dies, so will he be throughout eternity. The drunkard here will have all a drunkard's thirst there without the means of gratifying it. The swearer here will become a yet more ripe and proficient blasphemer. Death does not change but fixes character; it petrifies it. "He that is holy let him be holy still; he that is filthy let him be filthy still." The lost man remains a sinner and a growing sinner, and continues to rebel against God. Would you have such a man in heaven? Shall the thief prowl through the streets of the New Jerusalem? Shall the atmosphere of Paradise be polluted by an oath? Shall the songs of angels be disturbed by the ribaldry of licentious conversation? It cannot be. Heaven were no heaven, if the sinner could be permitted to enter it. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and as there is no hope of the finally lost ever being born again, that kingdom of God they cannot see. Sinner, if you are not fit for heaven now, hast thou any right to hope thou ever wilt be? If you die without God and without hope, where must your portion be? Without a God can ye dwell in heaven—God's own dominions? Without hope, can ye enter where hope is consummated in full fruition? Never. The enemies of God shall never be permitted to beard him to his face, and vent their blasphemies in his own palace; they must be driven from his presence, and driven from that presence for ever.

Moreover, not only does the man's character shut him out, but also *the sinner's doom.* What was it? "These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment." If it is everlasting, how can they enter heaven? What does the Saviour say, "Where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched." If there be any truth in that metaphor, the lost are lost for ever; the worm would die if they entered heaven, and the fire were quenched if they obtained celestial seats. How does the Holy Spirit put it? Does he not describe the wrath to come as a bottomless pit? It were not such if they could get handhold, and afterwards climb upward to the starry thrones of angels. Brethren, he that dooms men, he that has put it in the strong expression, "He that believeth not shall be damned," will certainly and literally carry out his own words; and if it be so, it shall never be possible for them to break their prison of fire, and enter the land of joy and peace.

Moreover, sinner, thou canst not go out of the prison-house because *God's character* and God's word are against thee. Shall God ever cease to be just? But if he be just, he must never cease from punishing thee when thou art finally condemned. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth," is the never ceasing cry of cherubim, but as long as he is "Holy, Holy, Holy," thou canst never be acceptable to him. Shall God ever cease to be true? But remember, as long as he is true to his own threatenings, he must and will send his arrows through you,

and make his fierce wrath to consume you. Then there stands his decree, "He that believeth not shall be damned;" this is the great gulf, that fixed chasm by which the impenitent sinner is fast as firmest destiny bound like Prometheus to the rock for ever, never to be loosed in time or in eternity. It must not—it shall not be—if God be God, and if his decree be not a falsehood and a vanity, ye must not come out of the place of your torment.

Nay, yet more, remember sinner, there never was but one bridge between fallen man and a holy God. That bridge you reject. The person of the Mediator, his substitution, his righteousness, his painful death, these make the only road from sin to righteousness, from wrath to acceptance. But these you reject. If you should ever be lost you will have finally rejected Christ; and inasmuch as you are not this morning saved, O my poor fellow creature, thou art now rejecting Christ; thou art as good as saying, "Christ died, but not for me; Christ shed his blood to save men, but I will not be saved in his way. Let him die. I count his death a trifle, and his blood a vanity; I had sooner perish than be saved by him." This is what you in effect are saying. I know the words make you shudder; you would not venture to utter them, but that is your feeling. Ye will not have this man to reign over you; you will not bow the knee and kiss the Son; you will still be an adversary to God, and sooner be destroyed than be saved through the atonement of Christ. Well, now, if you reject the only way, what wonder, if having rejected that, there remains no hope? Besides, remember there is no other sacrifice for sin. Scripture expressly tells us that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. Do you think that Jesus will come a second time to die? Shall those divine hands be stretched again to the wood? You reject him now. If he died again you would reject him. Shall the head again be pierced with thorns? Shall the side again be rent with the spear? Why, sinner, if thou refusest to have him now thou wouldest refuse him could he die a second time. But that cannot be. He has offered an atonement once for all, and now for ever he sits down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. No second atonement—no second redemption shall ever be offered for the sin of men.

Besides, remember, there is no Holy Spirit in the pit. The blessed Spirit is here to-day, and often has he striven with some of you. Do you remember when you trembled like Felix? Do not you remember the time when, like Agrippa, you were almost persuaded? but still all this was put away; conscience was hushed; the Spirit of God was quenched. Well, that Spirit can strive with you again, and if he comes forth in his irresistible strength, if your heart be like a flint, he can break it; and if like iron, he can melt it. But once in the pit, and the Holy Spirit never comes there. That blessed dove shuns the place of wrath, and over souls given up to destruction, never will his life-giving wings be known to brood. If so, then you cannot be born again, and cannot enter heaven; ye cannot be sanctified; and unsanctified spirits cannot have a portion in the skies. So then, it is clear enough you cannot possibly pass from hell to heaven. Ah, this will be a judgment upon you, a solemn judgment upon you for many things. You do not like the house of God; you

shall be shut out of it. You do not love the Sabbath; you are shut out from the eternal Sabbath. The voice of sacred song had no charm in it for you; you shall not join it. The face of God you never loved; you shall never see it. The name of Jesus Christ was never melodious in your ears; you shall never hear it. Jesus Christ was preached to you, but you rejected him; his blood you trod beneath your feet. The way to heaven was freely set open before you, but you would not come unto him that ye might have life. There is a road from earth to heaven: sinner, though thou hast gone into the depths of sin, if thou hast been the most infamous and most outrageous of offenders, there is a road for thee to heaven yet. The harlot, the thief, the profane, the drunkard, may yet find mercy through the grace of Jesus, but

> "There are no acts of pardon passed
> In that cold grave to which we haste;
> But darkness, death, and long despair
> Reign in eternal silence there."

God bless the solemn remarks we make, and he shall have the glory.

III. But now, once again to change the subject for a few minutes, I have to notice in the third place, that while no persons can pass that bridgeless chasm, so NO THINGS CAN. Nothing can come from hell to heaven. Rejoice ye saints in light, triumph in your God for this—no temptation of Satan can ever vex you when once you are landed on the golden strand; you are beyond bowshot of the arch-enemy; he may howl and bite his iron hands, but his howlings cannot terrify and his bitings cannot disturb. No longer shall you be vexed with the filthy conversation of the ungodly. Lot shall never hear another foul word. You shall not have to say, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar."

> "No light discourse shall reach your heart,
> Nor trifles vex your ear."

You shall be shut out from everything that belongs to hell. And, remember, you shall be in heaven, so secure that the wrath of God which makes hell shall never light on you. Your Saviour carried it, not a drop of it shall fall upon your persons. No present pains shall be in heaven, they are for the lost; no pains of body, no distractions of mind. You shall have no sin; sin cannot pass from them to you; you shall be perfect—like your Lord, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

> "Your inward foes shall all be slain,
> Nor Satan vex your peace again."

You shall have no fears for the future. You shall know that your bliss is eternal. This shall always be the honey of your honeycomb—that it lasts for ever. Millions of years you shall gaze into the face of your beloved; throughout endless ages you shall bask in the sunlight of his smile. This is joy, I say, to the Christian, if he will but think it over it will reconcile him to the hardest strokes of temporary tribulation, and make him rejoice in the hardest toil of this mortal struggle. Courage, man, it is but a day or two of wrestling, and then the immortal

crown; an hour or two of fighting, and then the everlasting rest. Methinks I see to-day the angels leaning from the battlements of the celestial palace, and as they mark you, like armed men cutting your way to the gates thereof, they cry to you :—

"Come in, come in,
Eternal glory you shall win."

Will ye sheathe your swords? Will ye stop the conflict? No; press on, and let your true Jerusalem blades cut through soul and spirit, and divide joint and marrow, till you reach the summit, and the eternal glory shall be yours.

IV. Again, we change the strain for a fourth point, and this a terrible one. As nothing can come from hell to heaven, so nothing heavenly can ever come to hell. There are rivers of life at God's right hand—those streams can never leap in blessed cataracts to the lost. Nay, Lazarus is not permitted to dip the tip of his finger in water to administer the cooling drop to the fire-tormented tongue. Not a drop of heavenly water can ever cross that chasm. See then, sinner, heaven is *rest*, perfect rest—but there is no rest in hell; it is labour in the fire, but no ease, no peace, no sleep, no calm, no quiet; everlasting storm; eternal hurricane; unceasing tempest. In the worst disease, there are some respites: spasms of agony, but then pauses of repose. There is no pause in hell's torments. The dreadful music of the eternal miserere has not so much as a single stop in it. It is on, on, on, with crash of battle, and dust and blood, and fire and vapour of smoke.

Heaven, too, is a place of *joy;* there happy fingers sweep celestial chords; there joyous spirits sing hosannahs day without night; but there is no joy in hell; for music there is the groan; for joy there is the pang; for sweet fellowship there is the binding up in bundles; for everything that is blissful there is everything that is dolorous. No, I could not exaggerate, that were impossible; I cannot come up to the doleful facts, therefore there I leave them. Nothing of the joy of heaven can ever come to hell.

Heaven is the place of *sweet communion* with God—

"There they behold his face,
And never, never sin;
There from the rivers of his grace,
Drink endless pleasures in."

There is no communion with God in hell. There are prayers, but they are unheard; there are tears, but they are unaccepted; there are cries for pity, but they are all an abomination unto the Lord. God willeth not the death of any; he had rather that he should turn unto him and live, but if that grace be refused—

"The Lord, in vengeance dressed,
Shall lift his hand and swear,
You that despised my promised rest
Shall have no portion there."

Tell me what heaven is if ye will, and I must say of any description that ye give of its joys, that there is none of them in Tophet, for heaven's blessings cannot cross from the celestial regions to the infernal prison-house. No, it is sorrow without relief, misery without hope, and here is the pang of it—it is death without end. There is only one thing that I know of in which heaven is like hell—it is eternal. "The wrath *to come*, the wrath *to come*, the wrath *to come*," for ever and for ever spending itself, and yet never being spent.

And now, would to God, I could speak with you as my heart desireth; for this is my only opportunity, since, as I have already said, I can do this no more if I be saved and if you be lost. Spare me, then, two or three minutes while I close this poor discourse of mine, by trying to reason with those of you who are unconverted. I have had little to say to God's people this morning; I may comfort them in the evening, but this morning I have to deal with you who fear not God. Many of you now present are unconverted. I will never flatter you by preaching to you as though you were all Christians. The Lord my God knoweth there is many a heart here that never was broken; there is many a spirit here that never trembled before the majesty of infinite justice, and never kissed the outstretched sceptre of a crucified Redeemer. You know this, some of you; you know you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. I do not mean you alone who live in open sin; but I mean you who are amiable, excellent, admirable in your carriage and deportment, but yet the love of God is not in you. There is no fault to be found with your outward character, may be, but you have not been born again; you have never passed from death unto life; and remember, sirs, there is the same hell for the most excellent as for the most abominable, unless ye fly to Christ—"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ;" and if ye believe not in him, ye shall die in your sins, "for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Come, then, let me plead with you, and I will ask you a question—do you believe all this? Do you believe that there is a hell? Do you believe that there is a heaven to be lost? If you profess that you do not so believe, I have done with you. God bring you to a better mind. But what did you come here for? Why do you profess to be a Christian if you reject the Christian's inspired Book? Become an infidel, and be honest. For my part, modern infidelity never gives me any alarm; I had as soon see you outwardly infidels, as to hear you pretend to be Christians, and yet disbelieve what that Book teaches. I like honesty, and it seems to me that when a man honestly says, "I shall not make a profession of believing what I do not believe," that there is at least one virtue in him, and we may hope that others may find soil to grow in. But you that profess to be religious, and attend your Church or your Chapel, and yet do not believe the revelation of God, what can I say to you, but that your damnation will be most just. I think I hear many of you say, "Believe it, sir, oh! we never doubted it; we learned it in our earliest childhood, we have heard it always, and we never ventured to doubt." Ah! well then, I ask you—are you in your sober senses to believe that there is a hell, and not seek to escape from it? Do you

believe there is a wrath to come, and that it may fall upon you in the next minute, for you may be dead and never leave this house of prayer, and yet do you sit easy in your pews; or are you mad? has sin so besotted you with its foul intoxication, that you cannot think? for if you can think, and there be an angry God who will punish with the awful force of his omnipotence, how is it that you can be at ease in Zion?

Let me ask you another question: if these things be so, have you used your senses in giving a preference to the pleasures of this life beyond the joys of heaven? in following the pleasures of to-day, when you know they will be followed with the miseries of eternity. Do not mistake, I do not mean to say that a Christian is without pleasures, we have the highest and purest pleasure that mortal or immortal can know; we have not the pleasures of sin, but we have higher, more delightful, and deeper pleasures. But this is what I mean, will you spend yourselves in sinful pleasure? will you occupy your time with lust, or drunkenness, or with the frivolities of fashionable life, and do you think that these are worth the expense that they will cause? "Oh," said one to me, who holds a high position in society, as I talked with him long, after having preached earnestly the gospel, he took me by the button, and he said, "it does seem to me to be an awful thing, that I, knowing as I do what will be my lot if I live and die as I am, should still act as I do. When you are with me," said he, "and I listen to a solemn address, I think there shall come a change over me; I will serve God, but O sir, you do not know the temptations of my life; you do not know how it is when I get into the midst of pomps and vanities, and perhaps mingle with men who ridicule all thoughts of religion, it all goes, and I am such a fool that I sell my soul—sell my soul for it." Oh! there are such fools here to-day, who sell their souls for a little sin—one or two whirls in the world's mad dance, and then the devil is your partner, and your mirth is over. I ask you to use your reason, and judge whether it be worth your while to gain the whole world and lose your own soul.

I shall put it to you in another way. How is it that ye do not lay hold of Christ, since this is the only time when there is a probability that Christ can be laid hold of. I will tell you why it is. You do not love Christ; you love sin. Or else you are too proud to come to Christ; you think yourselves good enough, and you think that Christ is not for such as you are, but only for great sinners and the lowest of the low. O sirs, is your pride such a fine thing, that you will be damned in order to maintain its dignity? Throw your pride down, come as a sinner must come, and lay hold of Jesus Christ. Or if it be your sin which hinders, may God the Holy Ghost help you to pluck out the right eye and cast off a right arm sooner than having two eyes and two arms to be cast into hell fire.

"But," saith one, "how may I lay hold on Christ?" May the blessed Spirit enable you to do it. Here it is, trust Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Conscious that you deserve his wrath, trembling because of his terrible law, look to Jesus. There hangs a bleeding Saviour. Methinks these eyes can see him bleeding there; God eternal, he by whom the heaven of heavens were made, and the earth and the fulness

thereof, takes upon himself the form of man and hangs upon the tree of the curse.

> "See from his head, his hands, his feet,
> Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
> Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
> Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

There is life in a look at that crucified One, there is life at this moment for thee. Will you glance at him with a tearful eye, "Jesus, slaughtered, martyred, murdered for my sake, I do believe in thee; here at thy feet I throw myself, all guilty, polluted, foul; let thy blood drop on me; turn thine eye upon me; say to me 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with the bands of my kindness have I drawn thee.' Come and welcome, sinner—come." I have but preached the law to you out of love. God knoweth how these hard things, as I speak them, make my heart bleed blood. O that you would believe in Jesus; he is freely preached to you—accept him. May the Spirit of God lead you now to accept him. These are no hard terms, no stern conditions of a blood-thirsty tyrant; he does but say, "Bow the knee and kiss the Son. Come, and welcome, sinner—come." Young man, wilt thou be saved or not? Thou sinner, yonder, with thy grey head, betokening the approach of death, wilt thou believe in Christ or not? It may be this is thy last time—thou shalt never hear the gospel faithfully and affectionately pressed home upon thee again. Wilt thou have Jesus to be thine? Spirit of God, lead that heart to say, "Yea, Lord, I will;" and as the acceptance is heard on earth, may it be registered in heaven, and may salvation come to that man's heart this day. The Lord bless you all, every one of you; and when he gathers his people together, may I and you, every one of us, be found at his right hand, to see his smiling face.

A Preacher from the Dead

"And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.—Luke xvi. 31.

MAN is very loath to think ill of himself. The most of mankind are very prone to indulge in apologies for sin. They say, "If we had lived in better times we had been better men; if we had been born into this world under happier auspices we should have been holier; and if we had been placed in more excellent circumstances we should have been more inclined to the right." The mass of men, when they seek the cause of their sin, seek it anywhere but in the right place. They will not blame their own nature for it; they will not find fault with their own corrupt heart, but they will lay the blame anywhere else. Some of them find fault with their peculiar position. "If," says one, "I had been born rich, instead of being poor, I should not have been dishonest." "Or if," says another, "I had been born in middle life, instead of being rich, I should not have been exposed to such temptations to lust and pride as I am now; but my very condition is so adverse to piety, that I am compelled by the place I hold in society, to be anything but what I ought to be." Others turn round and find fault with the whole of society; they say that the whole organism of society is wrong; they tell us that everything in government, everything that concerns the state, everything which melts men into commonwealths, is all so bad that they cannot be good while things are what they are. They must have a revolution, they must upset everything; and then they think they could be holy! Many on the other hand throw the blame on their training. If they had not been so brought up by their parents, if they had not been so exposed in their youth, they would not have been what they are. It is their parent's fault; the sin lay at their father's or their mother's door. Or it is their constitution. Hear them speak for themselves, "If I had such a temper as so-and-so, what a good man I would be! But with my headstrong disposition it is impossible. It is all very well for you to talk to me; but men have different turns of mind, and my turn of mind is such that I could not by any means be a serious character;" and so he throws the blame on his constitution. Others go a deal farther, and throw the blame on the ministry. "If," say they, "at one time the minister had been more earnest in preaching, I should have been a better man; if it had been my privilege to sit under sounder doctrine and hear the Word more faithfully preached, I should have been better." Or else they lay it at the door of professors of religion, and say, "If the church were more consistent, if there were no hypocrites and no formalists, then we should reform!" Ah! sirs, you are putting the saddle on the wrong horse, you are laying the burden on the wrong back; the blame is in your hearts, nowhere else. If your hearts were renewed you would be better; but until that is done, if society were remodelled to perfection, if ministers were angels, and professors of religion were seraphs, you would be none the better; but having less excuse for your sin, you would be doubly guilty, and perish with a more terrible destruction. But yet men will always be having it, that if things were different they would be different too; whereas, the difference must be made in themselves, if they begin in the right place.

Amongst other whims which have occured to the human mind, such an one

as that of my text may sometimes have arisen. "If," said the rich man in hell, "if one should arise from the dead, if Lazarus should go from heaven to preach, my hardened brethren would repent." And some have been apt to say, "If my aged father, or some venerable patriarch could rise from the dead and preach, we should all of us turn to God." That is another way of casting the blame in the wrong quarter: we shall endeavour, if we can, to refute such a supposition as that this morning, and affirm most strenuously the doctrine of the text, that "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Let us proceed with this subject.

Suppose a preacher should come from another world to preach to us, we must naturally suppose that he came from heaven. Even the rich man did not ask that he or any of his compeers in torment might go out of hell to preach. Spirits that are lost and given up to unutterable wickedness, could not visit this earth; and if they did, they could not preach the truth, nor lead us on the road to heaven which they had not trodden themselves. The advent of a damned spirit upon earth would be a curse, a blight, a withering blast; we need not suppose that such a thing ever did or could occur. The preacher from another world, if such could come, must come from heaven. He must be a Lazarus who had lain in Abraham's bosom, a pure, perfect, and holy being. Now, imagine for a moment that such an one had descended upon earth; suppose that we heard to-morrow a sudden piece of news—that a venerable spirit, who had been a long time buried, had on a sudden burst his cerements, lifted up his coffin-lid, and was now preaching the word of life. Oh! what a rush there would be to hear him preach! What place in this wide world would be large enough to hold his massive congregations! How would you rush to listen to him! How many thousands of portraits would be published of him, representing him in the dread winding-sheet of death, or as an angel fresh from heaven. Oh! how would this city be stirred: and not this city only, but this whole land! Nations far remote would soon hear the news; and every ship would be freighted with passengers, bringing men and women to hear this wondrous preacher and traveller who had returned from the bourne unknown. And how would you listen? And how solemnly would you gaze at that unearthly spectre! And how would your ears be attent to his every word! His faintest syllable would be caught and published everywhere throughout the world—the utterances of a man who had been dead and was alive again. And we are very apt to suppose, that if such a thing should happen, there would be numberless conversions, for surely the congregations thus attracted would be immensely blest. Many hardened sinners would be led to repent; hundreds of halters would be made to decide, and great good would be done. Ah! stop, though the first part of the fairy dream should occur, yet would not the last. If some one should rise from the dead, yet would sinners no more repent through his preaching than through the preaching of any other. God might bless such preaching to salvation, if he pleased; but in itself there would be no more power in the preaching of the sheeted dead, or of the glorified spirit, than there is in the preaching of feeble man to-day. "Though one should rise from the dead, they would not repent."

But yet, many men would suppose that advantages would arise from the resurrection of a saint, who could testify to what he had seen and heard. Now, the advantages, I suppose, could only be three. Some would say there would be advantage *in the strength of evidence which such a man could give to the truth of Scripture;* for you would say, "If a man did actually come from the pearly-gated city of Jerusalem, the home of the blest, then there would be no more dispute about the truth of revelation. That would be settled." Some would suppose that he could tell us more than Moses and the prophets had told us, and that there would be *an advantage in the instruction which he could confer,* as well as in the evidence which he would bear. And, thirdly, there may be some who suppose that it would be an advantage gained *in the manner in which such an one would speak,* "For surely," say they, "he would speak with great eloquence, with a far mightier power, and with a deeper feeling than any common preacher who had never beheld the solemnities of another world." Now, these three points one after another, and we think we will settle them.

I. First, it is thought that if one did come from the dead to preach, there would be A CONFIRMATION OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, and a testimony borne at which jeering infidelity would stand aghast in silence. Stop, we will see about that. We do not think so. We believe that the resurrection of one dead man to-day, to come into this hall and preach, would be no confirmation of the gospel to any person here present who does not believe it already.

If, my friends, the testimony of one man who had been raised from the dead were of any value for the confirming of the gospel, *would not God have used it before now?* This shall be my first argument. It is undoubtedly true that some have risen from the dead. We find accounts in Holy Scripture of some men who by the power of Christ Jesus, or through the instrumentality of prophets, were raised from the dead; but ye will note this memorable fact, that they never any of them spoke one word which is recorded, by way of telling us what they saw while they were dead. I shall not enter into any discussion as to whether their souls slept during the time of their death, or whether they were in heaven or not. That would be a discussion without profit, only gendering disputes, which could yield no fruit. I only say, it is memorable that there is not a record of any one of them having given any description of what they saw while they were dead. Oh, what secrets might he have told out, who had laid in his grave four days! Do ye not suppose that his sisters questioned him? Do ye not think that they asked him what he saw—whether he had stood before the burning throne of God, and been judged for the things done in his body, and whether he had entered into rest? But, however they may have asked, it is certain he gave no answer; for had he given an answer we should have known it now; tradition would have cherished the record. And do ye remember, when Paul once preached a long sermon, even until midnight, there was a young man in the third loft named Eutychus, who fell asleep, and fell down, and was taken up dead? Paul came down and prayed, and Eutychus was restored to life. But did Eutychus get up and preach after he had come from the dead? No; the thought never seems to have struck a single person in the assembly. Paul went on with his sermon, and they sat and listened to him, and did not care one fig about what Eutychus had seen; for Eutychus had nothing more to tell them than Paul had. Of all the number of those who by divine might have been brought again from the shades of death, I repeat the assertion, we have not one secret told; we have not one mystery unravelled by them all. Now, God knoweth best; we will not compare our surmises to divine decision. If God decided that resurrection men should be silent, it was best it should be; their testimony would have been of little worth or help to us, or else it would have been borne.

But again, I think it will strike our minds at once, that if this very day a man should rise from his tomb, and come here to affirm the truth of the gospel, *the infidel world would be no more near believing than it is now.* Here comes Mr. Infidel Critic. He denies the evidences of the Bible; evidences which so clearly prove its authenticity, that we are obliged to believe him to be either blasphemous or senseless, in that he does so, and we leave him his choice between the two. But he dares to deny the truth of Holy Scripture, and will have it that all the miracles whereby it is attested are untrue and false. Do you think that one who had risen from the dead would persuade such a man as that to believe? What? when God's whole creation having been ransacked by the hand of science, has only testified to the truth of revelation—when the whole history of buried cities and departed nations has but preached out the truth that the Bible was true—when every strip of land in the far-off East has been an exposition and a confirmation of the prophecies of Scripture; if men are yet unconvinced, do ye suppose that one dead man rising from the tomb would convince them? No; I see the critical blasphemer already armed for his prey. Hark to him; "I am not quite sure that you ever were dead; sir, you profess to be risen from the dead; I do not believe you. You say you have been dead, and have gone to heaven; my dear man you were in a trance. You must bring proof from the parish register that you were dead." The proof is brought that he was dead. "Well, now you must prove that you were buried." It is proved that he was buried, and it is proved that some sexton in old times, did take up his dry bones and cast his dust in the air. "That is very good: now I want you to prove

that you are the identical man that was buried." "Well I am, I know I am; I tell you as an honest man I have been to heaven, and I have come back again." "Well then," says the infidel, "it is not consistent with reason; it is ridiculous to suppose that a man who was dead and buried could ever come to life again, and so I don't believe you, I tell you so straight to your face." That is how men would answer him; and instead of having only the sin of denying many miracles men would have to add to it the guilt of denying another; but they would not be so much as a tithe of an inch nearer to conviction; and certainly, if the wonder were done in some far-off land, and only reported to the rest of the world, I can suppose that the whole infidel world would exclaim, "Simple childish tales and such traditions have been current elsewhere: but we are sensible men, we do not believe them." Although a churchyard should start into life, and stand up before the infidel who denies the truth of Christianity; I declare I do not believe there would be enough evidence in all the churchyards in the world to convince him. Infidelity would still cry for something more. It is like the horse-leech; it crieth, "Give, give!" Prove a point to an infidel, and he wants it proved again; let it be as clear as noon day to him from the testimony of many witnesses, yet doth he not believe it. In fact, he doth believe it; but he pretendeth not to do so, and is an infidel in spite of himself. But certainly the dead man's rising would be little worth for the conviction of such men.

But remember, my dear friends, that the most numerous class of unbelievers are a set of people who never think at all. There are a great number of people in this land that eat and drink, and everything else except think; at least, they think enough to take their shop shutters down of a morning, and put them up at night; they think enough to know a little about the rising of the funds, or the rate per cent. of interest, or something like how articles are selling, or the price of bread; but their brains seem to be given them for nothing at all, except to meditate upon bread and cheese. To them religion is a matter of very small concern. They dare say the Bible is very true, they dare say religion is all right; but it does not often trouble them much. They suppose they are Christians; for were they not christened when they were babies? They must be Christians—at least they suppose so; but they never sit down to enquire what religion is. They sometimes go to church and chapel and elsewhere; but it does not signify much to them. One minister may contradict another, but they do not know; they dare say they are both right. One minister may fall foul of another in almost every doctrine; it does not signify, and they pass over religion with the queer idea—"God Almighty will not ask us where we went to, I dare say." They do not exercise their judgments at all. Thinking is such hard work for them that they never trouble themselves at all about it. Now, if a man were to rise from the dead to-morrow these people would never be startled. Yes, yes, they would go and see him once, just as they go and see any other curiosity, the living skeleton, or Tom Thumb; they would talk about him a good deal, and say, "There's a man risen from the dead," and possibly some winter's evening they might read one of his sermons; but they would never give themselves trouble to think whether his testimony was worth anything or not. No, they are such blocks they never could be stirred; and if the ghost were to come to any of their houses the most they would feel would be, they were in a fearful fright; but as to what he said, that would never exercise their leaden brains, and never stir their stony senses. Though one should rise from the dead, the great mass of these people never would be affected.

And, besides, my friends, *if men will not believe the witness of God, it is impossible that they should believe the witness of man.* If the voice of God from the top of Sinai and his voice by Moses in the book of the Law, if his voice by the divers prophets in the Old Testament, and especially his own word by his own Son, who hath brought immortality to light by the gospel, cannot convince men, then there is nothing in the world that can of itself accomplish the work. No; if *God* speak once, but man regardeth him not, we need not wonder that we have to preach many a time without being regarded; and we should not harbour the thought that some men who had risen from the dead would have a greater power to convince than the words of God. If this Bible be not enough to convert you, apart from the Spirit, (and certainly it is not) then there is nothing

in the world that can, apart from his influence; and if the revelation which God has given of his Son Jesus Christ in this blessed book, if the Holy Scripture be not in the hands of God enough to bring you to the faith of Christ, then, though an angel from heaven, then, though the saints from glory, then, though God himself should descend on earth to preach to you, you would go on unsaved and unblest. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." That is the first point.

II. It is imagined, however, that if one of "the spirits of the just made perfect" would come to earth, even if he did not produce a most satisfactory testimony to the minds of sceptics, he would yet be able to give abundant information concerning the kingdom of heaven. "Surely," some would say, "if Lazarus had come from the bosom of Abraham, he could have unfolded a tale that would have made our hair stand upright, while he talked of the torments of the rich man; surely, if he had looked from the gates of bliss, he might have told us about the worm that dieth not and the fire that never can be quenched: some horrible details, some thrilling words of horror and of terror he might have uttered, which would have unfolded to us more of the future state of the lost than we know now." "And," says the bright-eyed believer, "if he had come on earth he might have told us of the saints' everlasting rest: he might have pictured to us that glorious city which hath the Lord God for its eternal light, the streets whereof are of gold, and its gates of pearl. Oh! how sweetly would he have descanted upon the bosom of Christ, and the felicity of the blest. He had been

> 'Up where eternal ages roll;
> Where solid pleasures never die,
> And fruits immortal feast the soul.'

Surely he would have brought down with him some handfuls of the clusters of Eshcol; he would have been able to tell us some celestial secrets, which would have cheered our hearts, and nerved us to run the heavenly race, and put a cheerful courage on." Stop; that is a dream too. A spirit of the just descending from heaven could tell us no more that would be of any use to us than we know already. What more could that spirit from heaven tell us of the pains of hell than we do already know? Is not the Bible explicit enough? Did not the lips of Christ dreadfully portray the lake of fire? Did he not, even he who wept over men, did he not in awful language tell us that God would say at last, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?" Do you need more thrilling words than these? "The worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." Do you need more terrible warnings than these,—"The wicked shall be cast into hell, with all the nations that forget God?" Do you want more awful warnings than this—"Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" What! do you want a fuller declaration than the words of God. "Tophet is prepared of old; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone doth kindle it?" You cannot want more than Scripture gives of that. Even that you try to run away and escape from; you say the book is too horrible, and tells you too much of damnation and hell. Sirs, if you think there is too much there, and therefore reject it, would you stand for an instant to listen to one who should tell you more? No; ye do not wish to know more, nor would it be of any use to you if you did. Do you need more details concerning the judgment, that day of wrath to which each of us is drawing nigh? Are we not told that the king "shall sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all people; and he shall divide them the one from the other, as the shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats." Suppose there were one here who had seen the solemn preparation for the great assize—one who had stood where the throne is to be planted, and had marked the future with a more piercing eye than ours. Yet of what avail would it be to us? Could he tell us more than Holy Writ hath told us now—at least, any which would be more profitable? Perhaps he knows no more than we. And one thing I am sure of, he would not tell us more about the rule of judgment than we know

now. Spirit that hath returned from another world, tell me, how are men judged? Why are they condemned? Why are they saved? I hear him say, "Men are condemned because of sin. Read the ten commandments of Moses, and you will find the ten great condemnations whereby men are for ever cut off." I knew that before, bright Spirit; thou hast told me nothing! "No," says he, "and nothing can I tell." "Because I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was sick, and ye visited me not; I was in prison, and ye came not unto me; therefore, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me. Depart, ye cursed!" "Why, Spirit, was that the word of the King?" "It was," says he. "I have read that, too; thou hast told me no more." If you do not know the difference between right and wrong from reading the Scripture, you would not know it if a spirit should tell you; if you do not know the road to hell and the road to heaven from the Bible itself, you would never know it at all. No book could be more clear, no revelation more distinct, no testimony more plain. And since without the agency of the Spirit, these testimonies are insufficient for salvation, it follows that no further declaration would avail. Salvation is ascribed wholly to God, and man's ruin only to man. What more could a spirit tell us, than—a distinct declaration of the two great truths.—"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help found!"

Beloved, we do solemnly say again, that Holy Scripture is so perfect, so complete, that it cannot want the supplement of any declaration concerning a future state. All that you ought to know concerning the future you may know from Holy Scripture. It is not right to say with Young—

> "My hopes and fears start up alarmed,
> And o'er life's narrow verge look down,
> On what? A bottomless abyss,
> A dread eternity."

It is not right to say that, as if it were all we know. Blessed be God, the saint does not look down upon a bottomless abyss; he looks up to the celestial "city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Nor do even the wicked look down upon an unknown abyss; for to them it is clearly revealed. Though "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," the tortures of the lost, yet hath Holy Scripture sufficiently told us of them to make it a well-mapped road; so that when they meet with death, and hell, and terror, it shall be no new thing; for they heard of it before, and it was distinctly revealed to them. Nothing more could we know that would be of any use. Tattlers, idle curiosity people, and such like, would be mightily delighted with such a man. Ah! what a precious preacher he would be to them, if they could get him all the way from heaven, and get him to tell all its secrets out! Oh, how would they love him—how would they delight in him! "For," say they, "he knows a great deal more than anybody else; he knows a great deal more than the Bible tells us; he knows a great many little details, and it is wonderful to hear him explain them!" But there the matter would end. It would be merely the gratification of curiosity; there would be no conferring of blessing; for if to know more of the future state would be a blessing for us, God would not withhold it; there can be no more told us. If what you know would not persuade you, "Neither would you be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

III. Yet some say, "SURELY, IF THERE WERE NO GAIN IN MATTER, YET THERE WOULD BE A GAIN IN MANNER. Oh, if such a spirit had descended from the spheres, how would he preach! What eloquence celestial would flow from his lips! How majestically would he word his speech! How mightily would he move his hearers! What marvellous words would he utter! What sentences that might start us from our feet, and make us quiver with their thrilling influence. There would be no dulness in such a preacher; it would be no fatigue to hear him; there would be no want of affection in him, and surely no want of earnestness; we might well be pleased to hear him every day, and never weary with his wondrous speech. Such a preacher earth hath never heard. Oh, if he would but come! How would we listen!"—Stay! that too is a dream.

I do believe that Lazarus from Abraham's bosom would not be so good a preacher as a man who has not died, but whose lips have been touched with a live coal from off the altar. Instead of his being better, I cannot see that he would be quite so good. Could a spirit from the other world speak to you more solemnly than Moses and the prophets have spoken? Or could they speak more solemnly than you have heard the word spoken to you at divers times already? O sirs, some of you have heard sermons that have been as solemn as death and as serious as the grave. I can recall to some of your memories seasons when you have sat beneath the sound of the word, wondering and trembling all the while. It seemed as if the minister had taken to himself bow and arrows, and were making your conscience the butt at which his shafts were levelled. You have not known where you were; you have been so grievously frighted and smitten with terror that your knees did knock together, and your eyes ran with tears. What more do you want than that? If that solemn preaching of some mighty preacher whom God had inspired for the time—if that did not save you, what can save you, apart from the influence of the Spirit? And oh! you have heard more solemn preaching than that. You had a little daughter once; that child of yours had been to the Sabbath-school; it came home, and was sick unto death; you watched it by night and day, and the fever grew upon it; and you saw that it must die. You have not forgotten yet how your little daughter Mary preached you a sermon that was solemn indeed: just before she departed she took your hand in her little hand, and she said, "Father, I am going to heaven; will you follow me?" That was a solemn sermon to you. What more could sheeted dead have said? Ye have not forgotten yet, how when your father lay a dying—(a holy man of God he had been in his day, and served his Master well)—you with your brothers and sisters stood around the bed, and he addressed you one by one. Woman! you have not forgotten yet, despite all your sin and wickedness since then, how he looked you in the face and said, "My daughter, 'twere better for thee that thou hadst never been born than that thou shouldst be a despiser of Christ and a neglecter of his salvation,' And you have not forgotten how he looked when with solemn tears in his eyes he addressed you and said, "My children, I charge you by death and by eternity, I charge you, if you love your own souls, despise not the gospel of Christ; forsake your follies, and turn unto God and live." What preacher do you want better than that? What voice more solemn than the voice of that of your own parent upon the confines of eternity? And you have not yet quite clean escaped from the influence of another solemn scene. You had a friend, a so-called friend; he was a traitor, one who lived in sin and rebelled against God with a high hand and an outstretched arm. You remember his death-bed, when he lay near to death terrors got hold of him; the flames of hell began to get their grip of him, before he had clean departed. You have not yet forgotten his shrieks, his screams; you have not yet quite got from your vision in your dreams that hand through which the finger nails were almost pierced in agony, and that face, contorted with direful twitchings of dismay. You have not clear escaped yet from that horrid yell with which the spirit entered the realm of darkness and forsook the land of the living. What more of a preacher do you want? Have you heard this preaching, and yet have you not repented? Then verily, if after all this you are hardened, neither would you be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

Ah! but you say, you want some one to preach to you more feelingly. Then, Sir, you cannot have him in the preacher you desire. A spirit from heaven could not be a feeling preacher. It would be impossible for Lazurus, who had been in Abraham's bosom, to preach to you with emotion. As a perfect being of course he must be supremely happy. Imagine this morning a supremely happy being preaching to you, about repentance and the wrath of God. Do you not see him? there is a placid smile ever upon his brow; the light of heaven gilds his face; he is talking about the torments of hell, it was the place for sighs and groans; but he cannot sigh; his face is just as placid as ever. He is speaking of the torments of the wicked, it was the time for tears; he cannot weep; that were incompatible with blessedness. The man is preaching of dreadful things with a smile upon his face; there is summer on his brow, and

winter on his lips—heaven in his eyes, and hell in his mouth. You could not bear such a preacher; he would seem to mock you. Ay, it needs a man to preach, a man like yourselves, who is capable of feeling. There wants one who, when he preaches of Christ, smiles on his hearers with love—who, when he tells of terror, quails in his own spirit whilst he utters the wrath of God. The great power of preaching, next to the power of God's Spirit, lies in the preacher's feeling it. We shall never do much good in preaching unless we feel what we utter. "*Knowing* the terrors of the Lord we persuade men." Now, a glorified spirit from heaven could not feel these things; he could show but little emotion. True, he could speak of the glories of heaven; and how would his face grow brighter, and brighter, and brighter, as he told the wonders of that upper world! But when he came to cry "Flee from the wrath to come," the voice would sound as sweet when he spoke of death and judgment, as when he spoke of glory; and that would make sad discord, the sound not answering to the sense—the modulations of his voice being unfit to express the idea upon the mind. Such a preacher could not be a powerful preacher, even though he came again from the dead.

And one thing we may say, he could not preach more closely home to you than you have had the truth preached to you. I shall not say that you have had preaching put very close to you from the pulpit. I have striven to be very personal sometimes: I have not shunned to point some of you out in the congregation, and given you a word of rebuke, such as you could not mistake; nor if I knew that any of you were indulging in sin would I spare you. I bless God that I am not afraid to be a personal preacher, and to shoot the arrow at each separate man when he needs it. But, nevertheless, I cannot preach home to you as I would. Ye are all thinking your neighbour is intended, when it is yourself. But you have had a personal preacher once. There was a great preacher called at your house one day; his name was Cholera and Death. A terrible preacher he! With grim words and hard accent he came and laid his hand upon your wife; and then he put his other hand on you, and you grew cold and well-nigh stiff. You remember how he preached to you then. He made your conscience ring again and again; he would not let you lie still; he cried aloud concerning your sin and your iniquity; he brought all your past life to light, and set all your evil conduct in review. From your childhood even up till then he led you through all your wanderings: and then he took the whip of the law, and began to plough your back with furrows. He affrighted you with "the wrath to come." You sent for the minister; you bade him pray; you thought you prayed yourself; and after all that, that preacher went away, and he had come on a fruitless errand; no good had been done to you; you had been a little startled and a little stirred, but you are to-day what you were then, unsaved and unconverted. Then, sir, you would not be converted, though one rose from the dead. You have been wrecked at sea; you have been cast into the jaws of the grave by fever; you have been nearly smitten to death by accident; and yet, with all this personal preaching, and with Mr. Conscience thundering in your ears, you are to-day unconverted. Then learn this truth, that no outward means in the world can ever bring you to the footstool of divine grace and make you a Christian, if Moses and the prophets have failed. All that can be done now is this: God the Spirit must bless the word to you, otherwise conscience cannot awaken you, reason cannot awaken you, powerful appeals cannot awaken you, persuasion cannot bring you to Christ. Nothing will ever do it except God the Holy Spirit. Oh! do you feel that you are drawn this morning? Does some sweet hand draw you to Christ, and does some blessed voice say, "Come to Jesus, sinner; there is hope for thee." Then that is God's Spirit. Bless him for it! He is drawing thee by the bands of love and the cords of a man. But oh! if thou be undrawn and left to thyself, thou wilt surely die. Brethren and sisters in the faith, let us lift up our prayers to God for sinners, that they may be drawn to Christ—that they may be led to come, all guilty and burdened, and look to Jesus to be lightened, and that they may be persuaded, by the coming power of the Spirit, to take Christ to be their "all-in-all," knowing that they themselves are "nothing at all." O God the Holy Spirit bless these words, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen and Amen.

The Importunate Widow

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily"—Luke xviii. 1—8.

REMEMBER that our Lord did not only inculcate prayer with great earnestness, but he was himself a brilliant example of it. It always gives force to a teacher's words when his hearers well know that he carries out his own instructions. Jesus was a prophet mighty both in deed and in word, and we read of him, "Jesus began both to do and to teach." In the exercise of prayer, "cold mountains and the midnight air" witnessed that he was as great a doer as a teacher. When he exhorted his disciples to continue in prayer, and to "pray without ceasing," he only bade them follow in his steps. If any one of all the members of the mystical body might have been supposed to need no prayer, it would certainly have been our Covenant Head, but if our Head abounded in supplication, much more ought we, the inferior members. He was never defiled with the sins which have debased and weakened us spiritually; he had no inbred lusts to struggle with. But if the perfectly pure drew near so often unto God, how much more incessant in supplication ought we to be! So mighty, so great, and yet so prayerful! O ye weak ones of the flock, how forcibly does the lesson come home to you! Imagine, therefore, the discourse of this morning is not preached to you by me, but comes fresh from the lips of one who was the great master of secret prayer, the highest paragon and pattern of private supplication, and let every word have the force about it as coming from such a One.

Turn we at once to our text, and in it we shall notice, first, *the end*

and design of the parable; secondly, we shall have some words to say upon *the two actors in it,* whose characters are intentionally so described as to give force to the reasoning; and then, thirdly, we shall dwell upon *the power which in the parable is represented as triumphant.*

I. First, then, consider OUR LORD'S DESIGN IN THIS PARABLE—"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

But can men pray always? There was a sect in the earlier days of Christianity who were foolish enough to read the passage literally, and to attempt praying without ceasing by continual repetition of prayers. They of course separated themselves from all worldly concerns, and in order to fulfil one duty of life neglected every other. Such madmen might well expect to reap the due reward of their follies. Happily there is no need in this age for us to reprobate such an error; there is far more necessity to cry out against those who, under the pretence of praying always, have no settled time for prayer at all, and so run to the opposite extreme. Our Lord meant by saying men ought always to pray, that *they ought to be always in the spirit of prayer,* always ready to pray. Like the old knights, always in warfare, not always on their steeds dashing forward with their lances in rest to unhorse an adversary, but always wearing their weapons where they could readily reach them, and always ready to encounter wounds or death for the sake of the cause which they championed. Those grim warriors often slept in their armour; so even when we sleep, we are still to be in the spirit of prayer, so that if perchance we wake in the night we may still be with God. Our soul, having received the divine centripetal influence which makes it seek its heavenly centre, should be evermore naturally rising towards God himself. Our heart is to be like those beacons and watch-towers which were prepared along the coast of England when the invasion of the Armada was hourly expected, not always blazing, but with the wood always dry, and the match always there, the whole pile being ready to blaze up at the appointed moment. Our souls should be in such a condition that ejaculatory prayer should be very frequent with us. No need to pause in business and leave the counter, and fall down upon the knees; the spirit should send up its silent, short, swift petitions to the throne of grace. When Nehemiah would ask a favour of the king, you will remember that he found an opportunity to do so through the king's asking him, "Why art thou sad?" but before he made him an answer he says, "I prayed unto the King of heaven;" instinctively perceiving the occasion, he did not leap forward to embrace it, but he halted just a moment to ask that he might be enabled to embrace it wisely and fulfil his great design therein. So you and I should often feel, "I cannot do this till I have asked a blessing on it." However impulsively I may spring forward to gain an advantage, yet my spirit, under the influence

of divine grace, should hesitate until it has said, "If thy Spirit go not with me, carry me not up hence." A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unlimbered gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe, but it should be like a piece of cannon, loaded and primed, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged. The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer; not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying.

Further, when our Lord says, men ought always to pray, he may also have meant that *the whole life of the Christian should be a life of devotion to God.*

"Prayer and praise, with sins forgiven,
Bring down to earth the bliss of heaven."

To praise God for mercies received both with our voices and with our actions, and then to pray to God for the mercies that we need, devoutly acknowledging that they come from him, these two exercises in one form or other should make up the sum total of human life. Our life psalm should be composed of alternating verses of praying and of praising until we get into the next world, where the prayer may cease, and praise may swallow up the whole of our immortality. "But," saith one, "we have our daily business to attend to." I know you have, but there is a way of making business a part of praise and prayer. You say, "Give us this day our daily bread," and that is a prayer as you utter it; you go off to your work, and as you toil, if you do so in a devout spirit, you are actively praying the same prayer by your lawful labour. You praise God for the mercies received in your morning hymn; and when you go into the duties of life, and there exhibit those graces which reflect honour upon God's name, you are continuing your praises in the best manner. Remember that with Christians to labour is to pray, and that there is much truth in the verse of Coleridge—

"He prayeth best who loveth best."

To desire my fellow creatures' good and to seek after it, to desire God's glory, and so to live as to promote it, is the truest of devotion. The devotion of the cloisters is by no means equal to that of the man who is engaged in the battle of life; the devotion of the nunnery and the monastery is at best the heroism of a soldier who shuns the battle; but the devotion of the man in business life, who turns all to the glory of God, is the courage of one who seeks the thickest of the fray, and there bears aloft the grand old standard of Jehovah-nissi. You need not be afraid that there is anything in any lawful calling that need make you desist from vital prayer; but, oh! if your calling is such that you cannot pray in it, you had better leave it. If it be a sinful calling, an unholy calling, of course, you cannot present that to God, but any of

the ordinary avocations of life are such that if you cannot sanctify them, it is a want of sanctity in yourself, and the fault lies with you. Men ought *always* to pray. It means that when they are using the lapstone, or the chisel, when the hands are on the plough handles, or on the spade, when they are measuring out the goods, when they are dealing in stocks, whatever they are doing, they are to turn all these things into a part of the sacred pursuit of God's glory. Their common garments are to be vestments, their meals are to be sacraments, their ordinary actions are to be sacrifices, and they themselves a royal priesthood, a peculiar people zealous for good works.

A third meaning which I think our Lord intended to convey to us was this: men ought always to pray, that is, *they should persevere in prayer*. This is probably his first meaning. When we ask God for a mercy once, we are not to consider that now we are not further to trouble him with it, but we are to come to him again and again. If we have asked of him seven times, we ought to continue until seventy times seven. In temporal mercies there may be a limit, and the Holy Ghost may bid us ask no more. Then must we say, the "Lord's will be done." If it be anything for our own personal advantage, we must let the Spirit of submission rule us, so that after having sought the Lord thrice, we shall be content with the promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and no longer ask that the thorn in the flesh should be removed. But in spiritual mercies, and especially in the united prayers of a church, there is no taking a denial. Here, if we would prevail, we must persist; we must continue incessantly and constantly, and know no pause to our prayer till we win the mercy to the fullest possible extent. "Men ought always to pray." Week by week, month by month, year by year; the conversion of that dear child is to be the father's main plea. The bringing in of that unconverted husband is to lie upon the wife's heart night and day till she gets it; she is not to take even ten or twenty years of unsuccessful prayer as a reason why she should cease; she is to set God no times nor seasons, but so long as there is life in her and life in the dear object of her solicitude, she is to continue still to plead with the mighty God of Jacob. The pastor is not to seek a blessing on his people occasionally, and then in receiving a measure of it to desist from further intercession, but he is to continue vehemently without pause, without restraining his energies, to cry aloud and spare not till the windows of heaven be opened and a blessing be given too large for him to house. But, brethren, how many times we ask of God, and have not because we do not wait long enough at the door! we knock a time or two at the gate of mercy, and as no friendly messenger opens the door, we go our ways. Too many prayers are like boys' runaway knocks, given, and then the giver is away before the door can be opened. O for grace to stand foot to foot with the

angel of God, and never, never, never relax our hold; feeling that the cause we plead is one in which we must be successful, for souls depend on it, the glory of God is connected with it, the state of our fellow men is in jeopardy. If we could have given up in prayer our own lives and the lives of those dearest to us, yet the souls of men we *cannot* give up, we must urge and plead again and again until we obtain the answer.

"The humble suppliant cannot fail
To have his wants supplied,
Since he for sinners intercedes
Who once for sinners died."

I cannot leave this part of the subject without observing that our Lord would have us learn that *men should be more frequent in prayer*. Not only should they always have the spirit of prayer, and make their whole lives a prayer, and persevere in any one object which is dear to their souls, but there should be a greater frequency of prayer amongst all the saints. I gather that from the parable, "lest by her continual coming she weary me." Prayerfulness will scarcely be kept up long unless you set apart times and seasons for prayer. There are no times laid down in Scripture except by the example of holy men, for the Lord trusts much to the love of his people and to the spontaneous motions of the inner life. He does not say, "Pray at seven o'clock in the morning every day," or "pray at night at eight, or nine, or ten, or eleven;" but says, "Pray without ceasing." Yet every Christian will find it exceedingly useful to have his regular times for retirement, and I doubt whether any eminent piety can be maintained without these seasons being very carefully and scrupulously observed. We read in the old traditions of James the apostle, that he prayed so much that his knees grew hard through his long kneeling: and it is recorded by Fox, that Latimer, during the time of his imprisonment, was so much upon his knees that frequently the poor old man could not rise to his meals, and had to be lifted up by his servants. When he could no longer preach, and was immured within stone walls, his prayers went up to heaven for his country, and we in these times are receiving the blessing. Daniel prayed with his windows open daily and at regular intervals. "Seven times a day," saith one, "will I praise thee." David declared that at "Evening, and morning, and at noon," would he wait upon God. O that our intervals of prayer were not so distant one from the other; would God that on the pilgrimage of life the wells at which we drink were more frequent. In this way should we continue in prayer.

Our Lord means, to sum up the whole, that *believers should exercise a universality of supplication*—we ought to pray at all times. There are no canonical hours in the Christian's day or week. We should pray from

cockcrowing to midnight, at such times as the Spirit moveth us. We should pray in all estates, in our poverty and in our wealth, in our health and in our sickness, in the bright days of festival and in the dark nights of lamentation. We should pray at the birth and pray at the funeral, we should pray when our soul is glad within us by reason of abundant mercy, and we should pray when our soul draweth nigh unto the gates of death by reason of heaviness. We should pray in all transactions, whether secular or religious. Prayer should sanctify everything. The word of God and prayer should come in over and above the common things of daily life. Pray over a bargain, pray over going into the shop and coming out again. Remember in the days of Joshua how the Gibeonites deceived Israel because Israel enquired not of the Lord, and be not thou deceived by a specious temptation, as thou mayst well be if thou dost not daily come to the Lord, and say, "Guide me: make straight a plain path for my feet, and lead me in the way everlasting." Thou shalt never err by praying too much, thou shalt never make a mistake by asking God's guidance too often; but thou shalt find this to be the gracious illumination of thine eyes, if in the turning of the road where two paths meet which seem to be equally right, thou shalt stay a moment and cry unto God, "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah." "Men ought always to pray." I have enlarged upon it from this pulpit, go you and expound it in your daily lives.

II. In enforcing this precept, our Lord gives us a parable in which there are TWO ACTORS, the characteristics of the two actors being such as to add strength to his precept.

In the first verse of the parable there is *a judge*. Now, herein is the great advantage to us in prayer. Brethren, if this poor woman prevailed with a judge whose office is stern, unbending, untender, how much more ought you and I to be instant in prayer and hopeful of success when we have to supplicate a Father! Far other is a father than a judge. The judge must necessarily be impartial, stern, but the father is necessarily partial to his child, compassionate and tender to his own offspring. Doth she prevail over a judge; and shall not we prevail with our Father who is in heaven? And doth she continue in her desperate need to weary him until she wins what she desires; and shall not we continue in the agony of our desires until we get from our heavenly Father whatsoever his word hath promised?

In addition to being a judge, he was *devoid of all good character*. In both branches he failed. He "feared not God." Conscience was seared in him, he had no thoughts of the great judgment-seat before which judges must appear. Though possibly he had taken an oath before God to judge impartially, yet he forgot his oath, and trod justice under his foot. "Neither did he regard man." The approbation of his fellow creatures, which is very often a power, even with naturally bad

men, either to restrain them from overt evil, or else to constrain them to righteousness, this principle had no effect upon him. Now, if the widow prevailed over such a wretch as this, if the iron of her importunity broke the iron and steel of this man's obduracy, how much more may we expect to be successful with him who is righteous, and just, and good, the Friend of the needy, the Father of the fatherless, and the Avenger of all such as are oppressed! O let the character of God as it rises before you in all its majesty of truthfulness and faithfulness, blended with lovingkindness, and tenderness, and mercy, excite in you an indefatigable ardour of supplication, making you resolve with this poor woman that you will never cease to supplicate until you win your suit.

The judge was a man so unutterably bad, that he *even confessed his badness to himself*, with great contentment too. Without the slightest tinge of remorse, he said within himself, "Though I fear not God, neither regard man." There are few sinners who will go this length. They may neither fear God nor regard men, yet still they will indulge in their minds some semblance of that which is virtuous, and cheat themselves into the belief that at least they are not worse than others. But with this man there was no self-deception. He was as cool about this avowal as the Pharisee was concerning the opposite, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." To what a brazen impertinence must this man have come, to what an extent must he have hardened his mind, that knowing himself to be such, he yet climbed the judgment-seat, and sat there to judge his fellow men! Yet the woman prevailed with this monster in human form, who had come to take pleasure in his own wickedness, and gloated in the badness of his own heart. Over this man importunity prevailed—how much more over him who spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all; how much more over him whose name is love, whose nature is everything that is attractive and encouraging to such as seek his face! The worse this judge appears, and he could scarcely have been painted in blacker colours, the more does the voice of the Saviour seem to say to us, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

Note with regard to the character of this judge, that he was one who *consciously cared for nothing but his own ease.* When at last he consented to do justice, the only motive which moved him, was, "lest by her continual coming she weary me. "She *stun* me," might be the Greek word—a kind of slang, I suppose, of that period, meaning lest "she batter me," "she bruise me," and as some translate it, "black my face with her incessant constant batterings." That was the kind of language he used; a short quick sentence of indignation at being bothered, as we should say, by such a case as this. The only thing that moved him was a desire to be at ease, and to take things comfortably. O

brethren, if she could prevail over such a one, how much more shall we speed with God whose delight it is to take care of his children, who loves them even as the apple of his eye!

This judge was *practically unkind and cruel* to her; yet the widow continued. For awhile he would not listen to her, though her household, her life, her children's comfort, were all hanging upon his will; he left her by a passive injustice to suffer still. But our God has been practically kind and gracious to us, up to this moment he has heard us and granted our requests. Set this against the character of the judge, and surely every loving heart that knows the power of prayer will be moved to incessant importunity.

We must, however, pass on now to notice the other actor in the scene—*the widow;* and here everything tells again the same way, to induce the church of God to be importunate. She was apparently *a perfect stranger to the judge.* She appeared before him as an individual in whom he took no interest. He had possibly never seen her before; who she was and what she wanted was no concern to him. But when the church appears before God she comes as Christ's own bride, she appears before the Father as one whom he has loved with an everlasting love. And shall he not avenge his own elect, his own chosen, his own people? Shall not their prayers prevail with him, when a stranger's importunity won a suit of an unwilling judge?

The widow appeared at the judgment-seat *without a friend.* According to the parable, she had no advocate, no powerful pleader to stand up in the court and say, "I am the patron of this humble woman." If she prevailed, she must prevail by her own ardour and her own intensity of purpose. But when you and I come before our Father, we come not alone, for—

> "He is at the Father's side,
> The Man of love, the Crucified."

We have a Friend who ever liveth to make intercession for us. O Christian, urge thy suit with holy boldness, press thy case, for the blood of Jesus speaks with a voice that must be heard. Be not thou therefore faint in thy spirit, but continue instant in thy supplication.

This poor woman came *without a promise to encourage her*, nay, with the reverse, with much to discourage; but when you and I come before God, we are commanded to pray by God himself, and we are promised that if we ask it shall be given us, if we seek we shall find. Does she win without the sacred weapon of the promise, and shall not we win who can set the battering-rams of God's own word against the gates of heaven, a battering-ram that shall make every timber in those gates to quiver? O brethren, we must not pause nor cease a moment while we have God's promise to back our plea.

The widow, in addition to having no promise whatever, was even *without the right of constant access.* She had, I suppose, a right to clamour to be heard at ordinary times when judgment was administered, but what right had she to dog the judge's footsteps, to waylay him in the streets, to hammer at his private door, to be heard calling at nightfall, so that he, sleeping at the top of his house, was awakened by her cries? She had no permission so to importune, but we may come to God at all times and all seasons. We may cry day and night unto him, for he has bidden us pray without ceasing. What, without a permit is this woman so incessant! and with the sacred permissions which God has given us, and the encouragement of abounding lovingkindness, shall we cease to plead?

She, poor soul, every time she prayed, *provoked the judge;* lines of anger were on his face. I doubt not he foamed at the mouth to think he should be wearied by a person so insignificant; but with Jesus, every time we plead we please him rather than provoke him. The prayers of the saints are the music of God's ears.

> "To him there's music in a groan,
> And beauty in a tear."

We, speaking after the manner of men, bring a gratification to God when we intercede with him. He is vexed with us if we restrain our supplications; he is pleased with us when we draw near constantly. Oh, then, as you see the smile upon the Father's face, children of his love, I beseech you faint not, but continue still without ceasing to entreat the blessing.

Once more, this woman had a suit in which *the judge could not be himself personally interested;* but ours is a case in which the God we plead with is more interested than we are; for when a church asks for the conversion of souls, she may justly say, "Arise, O God, plead thine own cause." It is for the honour of Christ that souls should be converted; it brings glory to the mercy and power of God when great sinners are turned from the error of their ways; consequently we are pleading for the Judge with the Judge, for God we are pleading with God. Our prayer is virtually *for* Christ as *through* Christ, that his kingdom may come, and his will may be done.

I must not forget to mention that in this woman's case *she was only one.* She prevailed though she was only one, but shall not God avenge his own elect, who are not *one*, but tens of thousands? If there be a promise that if two or three are agreed it shall be done, how much more if in any church hundreds meet together with unanimous souls anxiously desiring that God would fulfil his promise? These pleas cast chains around the throne of God! How do they, as it were, hem in omnipotence! How they constrain the Almighty to arise out of his place and

come in answer to his people, and do the great deed which shall bless his church and glorify himself.

You see, then, whether we consider the judge, or consider the widow, each character has points about it which tend to make us see our duty and our privilege to pray without ceasing.

III. The third and last point: THE POWER WHICH, ACCORDING TO THIS PARABLE, TRIUMPHED.

This power was not the woman's eloquence, "I pray thee avenge me of mine adversary." These words are very few. They have the merit of being very expressive, but he that would study oratory will not gather many lessons from them. "I pray thee avenge me of mine adversary." Just eight words. You observe there is no plea, there is nothing about her widowhood, nothing urged about her children, nothing said about the wickedness of her adversary, nothing concerning the judgment of God upon unjust judges, nor about the wrath of God upon unjust men, who devour widows' houses—nothing of the kind. "I pray thee avenge me of mine adversary." Her success, therefore, did not depend upon her power in rhetoric, and we learn from this that the prevalence of a soul or of a church with God does not rest upon the elocution of its words, or upon the eloquence of its language. The prayer which mounts to heaven may have but very few of the tail feathers of adornment about it, but it must have the strong wing feathers of intense desire; it must not be as the peacock, gorgeous for beauty, but it must be as the eagle, for soaring aloft, if it would ascend up to the seventh heavens. When you pray in public, as a rule the shorter the better. Words are cumbersome to prayer. It often happens that an abundance of words reveals a scarcity of desires. Verbiage is generally nothing better in prayer than a miserable fig leaf with which to cover the nakedness of an unawakened soul.

Another thing is quite certain, namely, that the woman *did not prevail through the merits of her case.* It may have been a very good case, there is nothing said about that. I do not doubt the rightness of it; but still, the judge did not know nor care whether it was right or wrong; all he cared about was, this woman troubled him. He does not say, "She has a good case, and I ought to listen to it." No, he was too bad a man to be moved by such a motive—but "she worries me," that is all, "I will attend to it." So in our suit—in the suit of a sinner with God, it is not the merit of his case that can ever prevail with God. Thou hast no merit. If thou art to win, another's merit must stand instead of thine, and on thy part it must not be merit but misery; it must not be thy righteousness but thy importunity that is to prevail with God. How this ought to encourage those of you who are labouring under a sense of unworthiness! However unworthy you may be, continue in prayer. Black may be the hand, but if it can but lift

the knocker, the gate will open. Ay, though thou have a palsy in that hand; though, in addition to that palsy, thou be leprous, and the white leprosy be on thy forehead, yet if thou canst but tremblingly lift up that knocker and let it fall by its own weight upon that sacred promise, thou shalt surely get an audience with the King of kings. It is not eloquence, it is not merit, that wins with God, it is nothing but importunity.

Note with regard to this woman, that the judge said first, she troubled him, next he said, she came continually, and then he added his fear lest "she weary me." I think the case was somewhat after this fashion. The judge was sitting one morning on his bench, and many were the persons coming before him asking justice, which he was dealing out with the impartiality of a villain, giving always his best word to him who brought the heaviest bribes; when presently a poor woman uttered her plaint. She had tried to be heard several times, but her voice had been drowned by others, but this time it was more shrill and sharp, and she caught the judge's eye. "My lord, avenge me of mine adversary." He no sooner sees from her poverty-stricken dress that there are no bribes to be had, than he replies, "Hold your tongue! I have other business to attend to." He goes on with another suit in which the fees were more attractive. Still he hears the cry again, "My lord, I am a widow, avenge me of mine adversary." Vexed with the renewed disturbance, he bade the usher put her out, because she interrupted the silence of the court and stopped the public business. "Take care she does not get in again to-morrow," said he, "she is a troublesome woman." Long ere the morrow had come, he found out the truth of his opinion. She waited till he left the court, dogged his footsteps, and followed him through the streets, until he was glad to get through his door, and bade the servants fasten it lest that noisy widow should come in, for she had constantly assailed him with the cry, "Avenge me of mine adversary." He is now safely within doors, and bids the servants bring in his meal. They are pouring water on his hands and feet, his lordship is about to enjoy his repast, when a heavy knock is heard at the door, followed by a clamour, pushing, and a scuffle. "What is it?" saith he. "It is a woman outside, a widow woman, who wants your lordship to see justice done her." "Tell her I cannot attend to her, she must be gone." He seeks his rest at nightfall on the housetop, when he hears a heavy knock at the door, and a voice comes up from the street beneath his residence, "My lord, avenge me of mine adversary." The next morning his court is open, and, though she is forbidden to enter, like a dog that will enter somehow, she finds her way in, and she interrupts the court continually with her plea, "My lord, avenge me of mine adversary." Ask her why she is thus importunate, and she will tell you her husband is dead, and he

left a little plot of land—it was all they had, and a cruel neighbour who looked with greedy eyes upon that little plot, has taken it as Ahab took Naboth's vineyard, and now she is without any meal or any oil for the little ones, and they are crying for food. Oh, if their father had been alive, how he would have guarded their interests! but she has no helper, and the case is a glaring one; and what is a judge for if he is not to protect the injured? She has no other chance, for the creditor is about to take away her children to sell them into bondage. She cannot bear that. "No," she says, "I have but one chance; it is that this man should speak up for me and do me justice, and I have made up my mind he shall never rest till he does so. I am resolved that if I perish, the last words on my lips shall be, 'Avenge me of mine adversary.'" So the court is continually interrupted. Again the judge shouts, "Put her out; put her out! I cannot conduct the business at all with this crazy woman here continually dinning in my ears a shriek of 'Avenge me of mine adversary.'" But it is sooner said than done. She lays hold of the pillars of the court so as not to be dragged out, and when at last they get her in the street, she does but wait her chance to enter again, she pursues the judge along the highways, she never lets him have a minute's peace. "Well," says the judge, "I am worried out of my very life. I care not for the widow, nor her property, nor her children; let them starve, what are they to me? but I cannot stand this, it will weary me beyond measure. I will see to it." It is done, and she goes her way. Nothing but her importunity prevails.

Now, brethren, you have many other weapons to use with God in prayer, but our Saviour bids you not neglect this master, all-conquering, instrument of importunity. God will be more easily moved than this unjust judge, only be you as importunate as this widow was. If you are sure it is a right thing for which you are asking, plead now, plead at noon, plead at night, plead on; with cries and tears spread out your case, order your arguments, back up your pleas with reasons, urge the precious blood of Jesus, set the wounds of Christ before the Father's eyes, bring out the atoning sacrifice, point to Calvary, enlist the crowned Prince, the Priest who stands at the right hand of God; and resolve in your very soul that if Zion do not flourish, if souls be not saved, if your family be not blessed, if your own zeal be not revived, yet you will die with the plea upon your lips, and with the importunate wish upon your spirits. Let me tell you that if any of you should die with your prayers unanswered, you need not conclude that God has disappointed you. With one story I will finish. I have heard that a certain godly father had the unhappiness to be the parent of some five or six most graceless sons. All of them as they grew up imbibed infidel sentiments, and led a libidinous life. The father who had been constantly praying for them,

and was a pattern of every virtue, hoped at least that in his death he might be able to say a word that should move their hearts. He gathered them to his bedside, but his unhappiness in dying was extreme, for he lost the light of God's countenance, and was beset with doubts and fears, and the last black thought that haunted him was, "Instead of my death being a testimony for God, which will win my dear sons, I die in such darkness and gloom that I fear I shall confirm them in their infidelity, and lead them to think that there is nothing in Christianity at all." The effect was the reverse. The sons came round the grave at the funeral, and when they returned to the house, the eldest son thus addressed his brothers:—"My brothers, throughout his lifetime, our father often spoke to us about religion, and we have always despised it, but what a sermon his deathbed has been to us! for if he who served God so well and lived so near to God found it so hard a thing to die, what kind of death may we expect ours to be who have lived without God and without hope?" The same feeling possessed them all, and thus the father's death had strangely answered the prayers of his life through the grace of God. You cannot tell but what, when you are in glory, you should look down from the windows of heaven and receive a double heaven in beholding your dear sons and daughters converted by the words you left behind. I do not say this to make you cease pleading for their immediate conversion, but to encourage you. Never give up prayer, never be tempted to cease from it. So long as there is breath in your body, and breath in their bodies, continue still to pray, for I tell you that he will avenge you speedily though he bear long with you. God bless these words for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Search for Faith

"Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"—Luke xviii. 8.

It is absolutely certain that God will hear the prayers of his people. From beneath the altar souls cry unto him day and night to vindicate the cause of Christ, the cause of truth and righteousness, and to cast down his adversary: these shall be answered speedily. Here on earth, scant though the supplication may be, yet there is a remnant according to the election of grace, who cease not to importune the Almighty God to make bare his arm, and display the majesty of his Word. Though for wise and gracious purposes the answer to those prayers may be delayed, yet it is absolutely certain. Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he keep their case long in hand? Assuredly he will; for those prayers are inspired by the Spirit, who knows the mind of God; they are for the glory of God and of his Christ, and they are presented by our great High Priest. Longsuffering keeps back the advent and the judgment for a while; for the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; but he will not for ever delay the long-expected end. The Lord Jesus himself gives us this personal assurance, "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." No doubt remains when Jesus says, "I tell you." The Lord will come, and, according to his own reckoning, he will come *quickly*. His reckoning is according to the chronology of heaven, and this the heirs of heaven ought gladly to accept: it is meet that we keep celestial time even now.

Brethren, let not your hearts fail you as to the ultimate issue of the present conflict. "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah." The idols he shall utterly abolish. Antichrist shall be overthrown; like a millstone cast into the sea, it shall fall and be no more. The heathen shall be our Lord's inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth shall be his possession. He must reign until all enemies shall be put under his feet. If the present contest should be continued century after century, be not weary. It is only long to your impatience; it is a short work unto God. So grand a volume of the book as this, which contains the history of redemption, may well

require a long time for its unrolling, and to such poor readers as we are the spelling of it out word by word may seem an endless task; but we shall yet come to its close, and then we shall find that, like the Book of Psalms, it ends in hallelujahs.

The matter to be questioned is not what God will do, but what men will do. Faithfulness is established in the very heavens: but what of faithfulness upon the earth? The part that God allots to us is that we believe his word, for so shall we be established: it is the child's part to trust his father, it is the disciple's part to accept the teaching of his Master. Alas! how little there is of it at this moment! Knowing the feebleness of the faith of those around him, and foreseeing that future generations would partake of the same folly, the Saviour gave utterance to this memorable question, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" God is faithful; but are men faithful? God is true; but do we believe him? This is the point: and it is upon this that I shall speak this morning as the Holy Ghost shall help me.

I. I notice with regard to our text, first, that IT IS REMARKABLE IF WE CONSIDER THE PERSON MENTIONED AS SEARCHING FOR FAITH: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

When Jesus comes he will look for precious faith. He has more regard for faith than for all else that earth can yield him. Our returning Lord will care nothing for the treasures of the rich or the honours of the great. He will not look for the abilities we have manifested, nor the influence we have acquired; but he will look for our faith. It is his glory that he is "believed on in the world," and to that he will have respect. This is the jewel for which he is searching. This heavenly merchantman counts faith to be the pearl of great price—faith is precious to Jesus as well as to us. The last day will be occupied with a great scrutiny, and that scrutiny will be made upon the essential point—where is there faith, and where is there no faith? He that believeth is saved; he that believeth not is condemned. A search-warrant will be issued for our houses and our hearts, and the enquiry will be: Where is your faith? Did you honour Christ by trusting his word and his blood, or did you not? Did you glorify God by believing his revelation and depending upon his promise, or did you not? The fact that our Lord, at his coming, will seek for faith should cause us to think very highly of faith. It is no mere act of the intellect; it is a grace of the Holy Spirit which brings glory to God and produces obedience in the heart. Jesus looks for it because he is the proper object of it, and it is by means of it that his great end in his first advent is carried out. Dear hearers, conceive for a minute that our Saviour is searching for faith now. "His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." This is the gold he seeks after amid the quartz of our humanity. This is the object of his royal quest—Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?"

When our Lord comes and looks for faith, *he will do so in his most sympathetic character.* Our text saith not, When the Son of *God* cometh, but "When *the Son of man* cometh, will he find faith on the earth?" It is peculiarly as the Son of man that Jesus will sit as a refiner, to discover whether we have true faith or not. He also as the Son of

man displayed faith in God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is mentioned as one of the points in which he is made like unto his brethren, that he said, "I will put my trust in him." The life of Jesus was a life of faith—faith which cried, "My God, my God," even when he was forsaken. His was, on a grander scale than ours, the battle of faith in the great Father, waged against all the rebellious influences which were in array against him. He knows what fierce temptations men experience, for he has felt the same. He knows how want tries the faithful, and what faith is needed to be able to say, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God shall man live." He knows how elevation tests the soul; for he once stood on the pinnacle of the temple, and heard the infernal whisper, "Cast thyself down: for he shall give his angels charge over thee." He knows what faith means in contradistinction to a false confidence which misreads the promise, and forgets the precept altogether. He will not err in judgment, and accept brass for gold. He knows what it is to be tempted with the proffer of honour and gain: "All these things will I give thee," said the fiend, "if thou wilt fall down and worship me." He knows how faith puts all the glory of the world away with its one brave and prompt utterance, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Beloved, when Jesus comes as the Son of man he will recognize our weaknesses, he will remember our trials; he will know the struggle of our hearts, and the sorrow which an honest faith has cost us. He is best qualified to put the true price upon tried faith, self-denying faith, long-enduring faith. He will discern between the men who presume and the men who believe; the men who dote upon vain delusions, and those who follow the plain path of God's own word.

Further, I would have you note well that *the Son of man is the most likely person to discover faith if it is to be found.* Not a grain of faith exists in all the world except that which he has himself created. If thou hast faith, my brother, the Lord has dealt with thee; this is the mark of his hand upon thee. By faith he has brought thee out of thy death in sin, and the natural darkness of thy mind. "Thy faith hath saved thee," for it is the candlestick which holds the candle by which the chamber of thy heart is enlightened. Thy God and Saviour has put this faith in thee. Now, if faith in every instance is our Lord's gift, he knows where he has given it. If it is the work of God, he knows where he has produced it; for he never forsakes the work of his own hands. If that faith be only as a grain of mustard seed, and if it be hidden away in the obscurest corner of the earth, yet the loving Jesus spies it out, for he has an intimate concern in it, since he is its author and finisher. Our Lord is also the sustainer of faith; for faith is never independent of him upon whom it relies. The greatest believer would not believe for another moment unless grace were constantly given him to keep the flame of faith burning. Beloved friend, if thou hast had any experience of the inner life at all, thou knowest that he that first made thee live, must keep thee alive, or else thou wilt go back to thy natural death. Since faith from day to day feeds at the table of Jesus, then *he* knows where it is. It is well for us that we have one looking

for faith who, on account of his having created and sustained it, will be at no loss to discern it.

Besides, *faith always looks to Christ.* There is no faith in the world worth having, but what looks to him, and through him to God, for everything. On the other hand, Christ always looks to faith; there never yet was an eye of faith but what it met the eye of Christ. He delights in faith: it is his joy to be trusted: it is a great part of the reward of his death that the sons of men should come and shelter in him. If faith looks to Christ, and Christ looks to faith, he is sure to find it out when he comes, and that makes the text so very striking: "When the Son of man cometh, shall *he* find faith on the earth?"

The Son of man will give a wise and generous judgment in the matter. Some brethren judge so harshly that they would tread out the sparks of faith; but it is never so with our gracious Lord; he does not quench the smoking flax, nor despise the most trembling faith. The question becomes most emphatic when it is put thus. The tender and gentle Saviour, who never judges too severely, when he comes, shall even he find faith on the earth? What a sad and humbling question it is! He who is no morose critic but a kind interpreter of character, he who makes great allowances for feebleness, he that carrieth the lambs of faith in his bosom and gently leads the weak ones—when even he shall come to make a kindly search, will he be able to find faith on the earth? Unbelief is rampant indeed, when he who is omniscient can scarce find a grain of faith amid the mass of doubt and denial! Ah me! that ever I should have to explain the question, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

Once more: I want to put this question into a striking light by dwelling on *the time of the scrutiny.* "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Look ye, brethren, the ages are accumulating proofs of the truth of Christianity, and the search takes place when this process has reached its climax. Whatever may be said about the present torrent of doubt, which no doubt is exceedingly strong, yet the reason for doubt grows weaker and weaker every year. Every mound of earth in the East contributes a fresh testimony to the accuracy of the Word of God. Stones are crying out against the incredulity of sceptics. Moreover, all the experiences of all the saints, year after year, are swelling the stream of testimony to the faithfulness of God. You that are growing grey in his service know how every year confirms your confidence in the eternal verities of your God and Saviour. I know not how long this dispensation of longsuffering will last; but certainly the longer it continues the more wantonly wicked does unbelief become. The more God reveals himself to man in ways of providence, the more base is it on man's part to belie his solemn witness. But yet, my brethren, at the winding-up of all things, when revelation shall have received its utmost confirmation, even then faith will be such a rarity on the earth that it is a question if the Lord himself will find it. You have, perhaps, a notion that faith will go on increasing in the world; that the church will grow purer and brighter, and that there will be a wonderful degree of faith among men in the day of our Lord's appearing. Our Saviour does not tell us so; but he puts the question of our text about it. Even concerning the

dawn of the golden age he asks, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

I want you to notice *the breadth of the region of search.* He does not say, shall he find faith among philosophers? When had they any? He does not confine his scrutiny to an ordained ministry or a visible church; but he takes a wider sweep—"Shall he find faith *on the earth?*" As if he would search from throne to cottage, among the learned and among the ignorant, among public men and obscure individuals; and, after all, it would be a question whether among them all, from the pole to the equator, and again from the equator to the other pole, he would find faith at all. Alas, poor earth, to be so void of faith! Is there none in her vast continents, or on the lone islets of the sea? May it not be found in some of the countless ships upon the deep? What! not upon the earth? Not with Jesus himself to look for it?

I have tried to set forth the question as distinctly as I can, that it may have due effect upon your minds. It sounds through the chambers of my soul like the knell of many a gay hope and pleasant imagination. Lord, what is man, that centuries of mercy can scarce produce a single fruit of faith among a whole world of the sons of Adam? When thousands of summers and autumns have come and gone, shall there be no harvest of faith upon the earth, except a few ears of corn, thin and withered by the east wind?

II. Let us somewhat change the run of our thoughts: having introduced the question as a remarkable one, we will next notice that IT IS EXCEEDINGLY INSTRUCTIVE IN CONNECTION WITH THE PARABLE OF WHICH IT IS PART. It is wrong to use the Bible as if it were a box full of separate links, and not a chain of connected truth. Some pick sentences out of it as a crow picks worms out of a ploughed field. If you tear words from their connection, they may not express the mind of the Spirit at all. No book, whether written by God or man, will bear to be torn limb from limb without being horribly mutilated. Public speakers know the unfairness of this to themselves, and Holy Scripture suffers even more. The connection settles the drift and directs us to the true meaning—a meaning which may be very different from that which it seems to bear when rent from its surroundings. Let us carefully note that this passage occurs in connection with the parable of the importunate widow pleading with the unjust judge; for it is to be interpreted in connection with it.

Hence, it means, first of all: When the Son of man cometh, shall he find upon the earth *the faith which prays importunately,* as this widow did? Now, the meaning is dawning upon us. We have many upon the earth who pray; but where are those whose continual coming is sure to prevail? I thank God that the prayer-meetings of this church are well sustained by praying men and women; but where are the Jacob-like wrestlers? I am afraid it cannot even be said of many churches that their prayer-meetings are at all what they should be; for among many the gathering for prayer is despised, and men say, "It is only a prayer-meeting!" As if that were not the very crown and queen of all the assemblies of the church, with the sole exception of that for the breaking of bread. Brethren, I will not judge with severity, but where are those who offer effectual, fervent, much-prevailing prayer? I

know that there are many here who do not neglect private and family devotion, and who pray constantly for the prosperity of the Church of Jesus Christ, and for the salvation of souls. But even to you I put the question: If the Son of man were now to come, how many would he find among us that pray with a distinct, vehement, irresistible importunity of faith? In the olden days, there was a John Knox, whose prayers were more terrible to the adversary than whole armies, because he pleaded in faith; but where shall we find a Knox at this hour? Every age of revival has had its men mighty in prayer—where are ours? Where is the Elias on the top of Carmel who will bring down the rain upon these parched fields? Where is the church that will pray down a Pentecost? I will not decry my brethren in the ministry, nor speak little of deacons and elders, and other distinguished servants of my Lord; but still, my brothers and sisters, taking us all round, how few of us know what it is to pray the heaven-overcoming prayer which is needful for this crisis! How few of us go again, and again, and again to God, with tears, and cries, and heart-break, pleading as for our own lives for the increase of Zion, and the saving of the ungodly! If the Son of man cometh, will he find much of such praying faith among our own churches? Ah me! that I should have to ask such a question; but I do ask it, hanging my head for shame.

The importunate widow waited with strong resolve, and never ceased through sullen doubt. If the judge had not yet heard her, she was sure he must hear her, for she had made up her mind that she would plead until he did. A waiting faith is rare. Men can believe for a time, but to hold out through the long darkness is another matter. Some soldiers are good at a rush, but they cannot form a square, and stand fast hour after hour. When the Son of man cometh, will he find many who can believe in a delaying God, and plead a long-dated promise—waiting, but never wearying? When we have a revival, and everybody is crying "Hosannah!" certain eager folk are snre to be in the front; but when the popular voice growls out its "Crucify him!" where are they? Where are even Peter, and John, and the rest of the disciples? Go, learn to plead on when no answer comes, and to press on when repulsed: this is the test of faith. It is so easy to be a believer when everybody believes; but to be a believer when nobody believes, and to be none the less a firm believer because nobody believes with you, this is the mark of the man valiant for truth, and loyal to Jesus. Brethren, is it, after all, a matter of counting heads? Can you not dare to be in the right with two or three? Can you not be like rocks which defy the raging waves? Can you not let the billows of popular misbelief wash over you, and break and crash, and break and crash in vain? If these things move you, where is your faith? When the Son of man cometh, how many will he find on the earth whose faith stands not in men, but in the witness of God?

The widow staked her all upon the result of her pleading with the judge. She had not two strings to her bow, she had but one resort in her trouble: the judge must hear her. She would lose her little property, and her children would die of starvation, if he did not hear her. He must hear her; about that she had no two opinions. What we want at the present moment is the man that believes God, and believes the

gospel, and believes Christ, and does not care two pins about anything else. We need those who will stake reputation, hope, and life itself upon the veracity of God and the certainty of the everlasting gospel. To such the revelation of God is not one among many truths: it is the one and only saving truth. Alas! we have nowadays to deal with foxes with holes to run to in case they are too closely hunted. Oh, to have done with all glory but glorying in the cross! For my part, I am content to be a fool if the old gospel be folly. What is more, I am content to be lost if faith in the atoning sacrifice will not bring salvation. I am so sure about the whole matter, that if I were left alone in the world as the last believer in the doctrines of grace, I would not think of abandoning them, nor even toning them down to win a convert. My all is staked on the veracity of God: "Let God be true, but every man a liar."

"When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth," such as he deserves at our hands? Do we believe in Jesus practically, in matter-of-fact style? Is our faith fact, and not fiction? If we have the truth of faith, have we the degree of faith which we might have? Just think of this: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove." What does this mean? Brethren, are we not off the rails? Do we even know what faith means? I begin sometimes to question whether we believe at all. What signs follow our believing? When we think what wonders faith could have done; when we consider what marvels our Lord might have wrought among us if it had not been for our unbelief; are we not humiliated? Have we ever cut ourselves clear of the hamper of self-trustfulness? Have we ever launched out into the deep in clear reliance upon the eternal God? Have we ever quitted the visible for the invisible? Have we clung to the naked promise of God and rested upon the bare arm of omnipotence, which in and of itself is more than sufficient for the fulfilment of every promise? O Lord, where are we? Where shall we find an oasis of faith amid this wilderness of doubt? Where shall we find an Abraham? Is not the question an instructive one when set in connection with the parable which teaches us the power of importunate prayer?

III. In the next place, our text seems to me to be SUGGESTIVE IN VIEW OF ITS VERY FORM. It is put as a question: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" I think it warns us *not to dogmatize about what the latter days will be.* Jesus puts it as a question. Shall he find faith on the earth? If you say, "No," my dear friend, I shall be very much inclined to take the other side, and warmly plead the affirmative. I remember how Elias said that he only was left, and yet the Lord had reserved unto himself seven thousand men that had not bowed the knee to Baal. Nations that know not Christ shall run unto him, and the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. I venture to hope that when the Son of man comes he will find faith on the earth: but if you vehemently assert that it will be so, I shall be driven to advance the negative side with much apprehension that it may prove true. When our Lord was here before, he found little enough of faith; and he has distinctly told us that when he shall come the second time, men will be as they were in the days of Noah: "they

did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark." I am inclined to take neither side. Let it remain a question, as our Lord has put it.

This question leads us to much holy fear as to the matter of faith. If our gracious Lord raises the question, the question ought to be raised. They say that some of us are old fogies, because we are jealous for the Lord of hosts. They say that we are nervous and fidgety, and that our fears are the result of advancing age. Yes, at fifty-three I am supposed to be semi-imbecile with years. If I were of their way of thinking, I do not suppose that this would occur to them. We fall into a pessimism—I think that is the word they use: I do not know much about such terms. Surely the Saviour was not nervous. None will dare to accuse him of foolish anxiety; but yet he puts it, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" As far as my observation goes, it is a question which might suggest itself to the most hopeful persons at this time; for *many processes are in vigorous action which tend to destroy faith.* The Scriptures are being criticized with a familiarity which shocks all reverence, and their very foundation is being assailed by persons who call themselves Christians. A chilling criticism has taken the place of a warm, childlike, loving confidence. As one has truly said, "We have now a temple without a sanctuary." Mystery is discarded that reason may reign. Men have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil till they think themselves gods. Revealed truth is not now a doctrine to be believed, but a proposition to be discussed. The loving woman at Jesus' feet is cast out to make room for the traitor kissing Christ's cheek. Like Belshazzar, our men of modern thought are drinking out of the vessels of Jehovah's sanctuary in honour of their own deities. The idea of child-like faith is scouted, and he is regarded as the most honest man that can doubt the most, and pour most contempt upon the authority of the divine word. If this continues we may well say, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" In some places the greatest fountain of infidelity is the Christian pulpit. If this is the case—and I am sure it is so—what must become of the churches, and what must come to the outlying world? Will Jesus find faith in the earth when he comes?

In addition to many processes which are in action to exterminate faith, *are there not influences which dwarf and stunt it?* Where do you find great faith? Where is the preaching or the teaching that is done in full faith in what is preached and taught? It is no use flogging other people; let us come home to ourselves. My brothers and sisters, where is our own faith? It seemed almost a novelty in the church when it was stated long ago that Mr. George Müller walked by faith in regard to temporal things. To feed children by faith in God was looked upon as a pious freak. We have come to a pretty pass, have we not, when God is not to be trusted about common things? Abraham walked with God about daily life; but, nowadays, if you meet with a man who walks with God as to his business, trusts God as to every item and detail of his domestic affairs, persons look at him with a degree of suspicious wonder. They think he has grace in his heart, but they also suspect that he has a bee in his bonnet, or he would not act

in that sort of way. Oh yes, we have a fancied faith; but when it comes to the stern realities of life where is our faith?

My brethren, why are you so full of worldly care? Why are you so anxious, if you have faith in God? Why do you display in worldly things almost as much distrust as worldly men? Whence this fear? this murmuring? this worry? O my Saviour, if thou wert to come, we could not defend ourselves for our wretched mistrust, our foolish apprehension, our want of loving reliance upon thee. We do not trust thee as thou oughtest to be trusted; and if this be the case among those who are such great debtors to thy loving faithfulness, where wilt thou find faith on earth? Where is that unstaggering faith which betakes itself to prevailing prayer, and so rises above the petty miseries of the hour, and the fears of a threatening future?

Do you not think that this, put in a question as it is, *invites us to intense watchfulness over ourselves?* Do you not think it should set us scrutinizing ourselves as our Lord will scrutinize us when he comes? You have been looking for a great many things in yourself, my brother; let me entreat you to look to your faith. What if love grow cold! I am sorry for it; but, after all, the frost must have begun in your faith. You are not so active as you used to be; that is to be greatly regretted; but the streams run low because the well-head is not so full as it was wont to be; your faith is failing. Oh that your soul were fed upon divine realities! Oh that you had a vivid consciousness of the certainty of God's presence and power! When faith is strong, all the other graces are vigorous. The branches flourish when the root sucks up abundant nutriment; and when faith is in a healthy state, all the rest of the spiritual man will be vigorous also. Brethren, guard well your faith. My fear is that when Christ comes, if he delays much longer, he will find many of us faint because of our long waiting, and because of the disappointments which arise out of the slow spread of the gospel. The nations continue in unbelief. O Lord, how long! Because we have not accomplished all that we hoped to have done, we are apt to grow weary. Or perhaps when he comes he will find us sleeping for sorrow, like the disciples in the garden when he came to them thrice and found them very heavy. We may get to feel so sad that the gospel does not conquer all mankind, that we may fall into a swoon of sadness, a torpor of despair, and so be asleep when the Bridegroom cometh. I fear, most of all, that when Jesus comes he may find that the love of many has waxed cold because iniquity abounds. Warm-hearted saints keep each other warm, but cold also is contagious. When sin abounds saints may be able to stand against it; and yet it has a sad tendency to chill their faith. If the Master comes and finds us lukewarm, it will be a calamity indeed. The question stirs a bitter anguish in my soul. I trust it moves you also.

It is a question. I cannot answer it, but I open wide the doors of my heart to let it enter and try me. It acts like a fan in the Lord's hand to purge the floor. It sweeps away my self-confidence and leads me to watch and pray, that I enter not into the temptation of giving up my faith. I pray that we may stand fast when others slide, so that when the Lord cometh we may be found accepted of him.

IV. I will close with this remark: my text is very IMPRESSIVE IN RESPECT TO PERSONAL DUTY. "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth." Let faith have a home in *our* hearts, if it is denied a lodging everywhere else. If *we* do not trust our Lord, and trust him much more than we have ever done, we shall deserve his gravest displeasure. It will be a superfluity of naughtiness for us to doubt; for to some of us conversion was a clear, sharp, and distinct fact. The change made in our characters was so manifest that the devil himself could not make us doubt it. We know that the misery we suffered under a sense of sin was no fiction, and that the peace we received through faith in Jesus was no dream. Wherefore do we doubt? Since conversion some of us have been led in a strange way, and every step of it has shown us that the Lord is good and true, and ought to be trusted without stint. We have been sore sick, and full of pain, and anguish, and depression of spirit, and yet we have been upheld, and sustained, and brought through. In great labours we have been strengthened, in great undertakings we have been supported. Some of you have been very poor, or your business has been declining, and emergencies have been frequent, and yet all these have proved the truth of God. Do not these things make it the more incumbent upon you to trust him? Others of you have suffered sad bereavements: you have lost, one after another, the props of your comfort; but when you have gone to God he has heard your prayers, and been better to you than father, husband, or friend. It is down in your diary in black and white that his mercy endureth for ever; and you have said to yourself many times, "I shall never doubt again after this." Brethren, it ought to us to be impossible to mistrust, and natural to confide; and yet I fear it is not so. If after all this watering we grow so little faith, we may not wonder that our Lord said, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

Some of us have been so familiar with dying beds, we have seen so many pass away in holy calm, and even with transporting triumph, that for us to doubt is disrespect to the memories of the saints. For us to doubt would be treachery to the Lord who has favoured ourselves also with visits of his love. We may doubt the dearest ones we have, and that would be cruel; but we had better do that than cast any suspicion upon him who has manifested himself to us as he does not to the world. I speak not to you all, but I speak to those whom the Lord has specially favoured, to whom he has revealed his secrets, and made known his covenant; for these to question his faithfulness is wickedness. What shall I say of his own elect, if they do not believe him? If it were possible for you to quit your faith, you would crucify your Lord afresh. He must not be thus wounded in the house of his friends. No, go where thou wilt, O unbelief, thou shalt not find willing lodgment in my heart. From my spirit thou shalt be banished as a detested traitor; for my Beloved is true, and I will lean upon him.

I think I hear you say, "We are resolved upon it; we are called to have faith in our Lord, even if none else believe him." Then look to it that you do not fail in these evil times. If you would keep your faith, settle it in your minds that the Holy Scriptures are inspired of the Holy Ghost, and so are our infallible rule of faith. If you give up that

foundation you cannot exhibit faith worthy of the name. It is as clear as the sun in the heavens that a childlike faith in God as he is revealed is not possible to the man who doubts the revelation. You must accept the revelation as infallible, or you cannot unquestioningly believe in the God therein revealed. If you once give up inspiration, the foundations are removed, and all building is laborious trifling. How are the promises the support of faith if they are themselves questionable? God can only be known by his own light, and if we cannot trust the light, where are we? Next, settle it in your soul as to the Holy Spirit's dealings with yourself. He has renewed you in the spirit of your mind. At least, I ask the question—Has he or has he not? You were converted by a divine agency from your lost estate of sin, and brought by the same divine agency into newness of life: were you or were you not? Unless you are quite certain about this, it is not possible for you to rise to any height of faith. You must know that God has come into contact with your soul, or else what have you to believe? Next to that belief, you must know your full pardon and sure justification through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ your Lord. Believe in the precious blood: whatever else you doubt, believe in the merit of the great sacrifice of Calvary. Rejoice in your own acceptance through the sacrifice, seeing your whole faith rests therein. O brothers, our eternal hopes cannot be built on speculation; we need revelation. We cannot fight the battles of life with probabilities; we need certainties for such a conflict. If God has not revealed fixed truth, you may go and think and dream; but if he has given us a clear revelation, let us believe it, and cease to imagine and invent. O sirs, if you must speculate, risk your silver and your gold; but I beseech you to lay aside all idea of speculating in reference to your souls. I want absolute certainties and unquestionable verities to bear me up when death's cold flood is rising up to my loins. Divine truths, as they are written in the Book, and brought home to the heart by the Holy Ghost, are sure standing ground for that faith which Jesus looks for. He looks for it in vain when men no longer accept his work as undoubted fact. Again, if you would have strong faith, never relax your confidence in the efficacy of prayer. This is essential to my text; for the widow used no other weapon than prayer in her importunity with the judge. She would not have persevered as she did in her pleadings if she had not felt morally certain that in the long run she would prevail. Brethren, believe that God hears your prayers, and that he will answer them. As for me, I do not want any argument to prove the influence of prayer with God. I have tried it, and do try it, till it is no longer an experiment. The man that habitually eats bread knows that he is nourished by it: the man that habitually lives by prayer to God knows that God hears him. It would be absurd to offer him evidence for or against the statement. If a person were to argue with me that there was no sun in the heavens, I am afraid I should laugh outright. If anyone said that he did not believe me to be alive, I do not know in what way I could prove it to him. Would it be lawful to kick him, by way of argument? When a man says, "I do not believe in prayer," I answer, "What if you do not? You are the only loser." That God answers prayer is a living certainty to me, and I can say no more and no less. If you do not believe in prayer,

assuredly the Lord will not find in you the faith of which our text speaks. If you regard it as a pious exercise which refreshes the devout but has no power whatever with God—well then, if all are of your mind, the Son of man will find no faith on the earth. Do not talk about believing, you know nothing of the matter.

If you do believe, believe up to the hilt. Plunge into this sea of holy confidence in God, and you shall find waters to swim in. He that believes what he believes shall see what he shall see. No man was ever yet found guilty of believing in God too much. Among the high intelligences of heaven no creature was ever censured for being too credulous when dealing with the word of the Most High. Let us believe implicitly and explicitly. Let us believe without measure and without reserve. Let us hang our all upon the truth of God. Let us aspire also to walk with God in the heavenlies, and become the King's Remembrancers. Let us seek grace to become importunate pleaders of a sort that cannot be denied, since their faith overcomes heaven by prayer. Oh, that I might have in my church many a prevailing Israel! Some here know what it is to be up early in the morning to besiege the throne of grace with all the power of believing prayer. How much I owe to these dear ones, eternity alone will declare! Oh, that we had many more intercessors, who would bear sinners on their hearts day and night, before the Lord, and, like their Saviour, would never rest till the Lord built up his church! Alas, for the rarity of such conquering faith! I question whether there are not Christian people here who have never heard a certain text which I am about to quote; and I am sure there are others who will shudder when they hear it. "Thus saith the Lord, concerning the work of my hands command ye me." "Surely that cannot be Scripture!" cries one. But it is so. Turn to Isaiah xlv. 11, and read it both in the Authorized and the Revised Versions. Can a man command the Lord? Yes, to believing men he puts himself at their call; he bids them command his help, and use it as they will. Oh that we could rise to this! Is there such faith among us? If there be not, may our Lord Jesus, by his Spirit, work it in us for his own glory! Amen.

A Sermon for the Worst Man on Earth

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner"—Luke xviii. 13.

It was the fault of the Pharisee that, though he went up into the temple to pray, he did not pray; there is no prayer in all that he said. It is one excellence of the publican that he went up to the temple to pray, and he did pray: there is nothing but prayer in all that he said. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is a pure, unadulterated prayer throughout. It was the fault of the Pharisee that when he went up to the temple to pray he forgot an essential part of prayer, which is confession of sin: he spoke as if he had no sins to confess, but many virtues to parade. It was a chief excellence in the devotion of the publican that he did confess his sin, ay, that his utterance was full of confession of sin: from beginning to end it was an acknowledgment of his guilt, and an appeal for grace to the merciful God. The prayer of the publican is admirable for its fulness of meaning. An expositor calls it *a holy telegram;* and certainly it is so compact and so condensed, so free from superfluous words, that it is worthy to be called by that name. I do not see how he could have expressed his meaning more fully or more briefly. In the original Greek the words are even fewer than in the English. Oh, that men would learn to pray with less of language and more of meaning! What great things are packed away in this short petition! God, mercy, sin, the propitiation, and forgiveness.

He speaketh of great matters, and trifles are not thought of. He has nothing to do with fastings twice in the week, or the paying of tithes, and such second-rate things; the matters he treats of are of a higher order. His trembling heart moves among sublimities which overcome him, and he speaks in tones consistent therewith. He deals with the greatest things that ever can be: he pleads for his life, his soul. Where could he find themes more weighty, more vital to his eternal interests? He is not playing at prayer, but pleading in awful earnest.

His supplication speeded well with God, and he speedily won his suit with heaven. Mercy granted to him full justification. The prayer so pleased the Lord Jesus Christ, who heard it, that he condescended to

become a portrait painter, and took a sketch of the petitioner. I say the prayer in itself was so pleasing to the gracious Saviour, that he tells us how it was offered: "Standing afar off, he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast." Luke, who, according to tradition, was somewhat of an artist as well as a physician, takes great care to place this picture in the national portrait gallery of men saved by sovereign grace. Here we have the portrait of a man who called himself *the* sinner, who may yet be held up as a pattern to saints. I am glad to have the divine sketch of this man, that I may see the bodily form of his devotion. I am gladder still to have his prayer, that we may look into the very soul of his pleading. My heart's desire this morning is that many here may seek mercy of the Lord as this publican did, and go down to their houses justified. I ask no man to use the same words. Let no man attach a superstitious value to them. Alas, this prayer has been used flippantly, and foolishly, and almost looked upon as a sort of charm! Some have said—"We may live as we like, for we have only to say, 'God be merciful to me,' when we are dying, and all will be well." This is a wicked misuse of gospel truth; yea, it turns it into a lie. If you choose thus to pervert the grace of the gospel to your own destruction, your blood must be on your own heads. You may not have space given you in which to breathe out even this brief sentence; or if you have, the words may not come from your heart, and so you may die in your sins. I pray you, do not thus presume upon the forbearance of God. But if with the publican's heart we can take the publican's attitude, if with the publican's spirit we can use the publican's words, then there will follow a gracious acceptance, and we shall go home justified. If such be the case, there will be grand times to-day, for angels will rejoice over sinners reconciled to God, and made to know in their own souls the boundless mercy of the Lord.

In preaching upon the text, I shall endeavour to bring out its innermost spirit. May we be taught of the Spirit, so that we may learn four lessons from it!

I. The first is this—THE FACT OF SINNERSHIP IS NO REASON FOR DESPAIR. You need none of you say, "I am guilty, and therefore I may not approach to God; I am so greatly guilty that it would be too daring a thing for me to ask for mercy." Dismiss such thoughts at once. My text and a thousand other arguments forbid despair.

For, first, *this man who was a sinner yet dared to approach the Lord.* According to our version, he said, "God be merciful to me *a* sinner," but a more accurate rendering is that which the Revised Version puts in the margin—"*the* sinner." He meant to say that he was emphatically *the* sinner. The Pharisee yonder was *the* saint of his age: but this publican who stood afar off from the holy place was *the* sinner. If there was not another sinner in the world, he was one; and in a world of sinners he was a prominent offender—the sinner of sinners. Emphatically he applies to himself the guilty name. He takes the chief place in condemnation, and yet he cries, "God be merciful to me *the* sinner." Now if you know yourself to be a sinner, you may plead with God; but if you mourn that you are not only a sinner, but *the* sinner with the definite article, the sinner above all others, you may still hope in the mercy of the Lord. The worst, the most profane, the most

horrible of sinners may venture, as this man did, to approach the God of mercy. I know that it looks like a daring action; therefore you must do it by faith. On any other footing but that of faith in the mercy of God, you who are a sinner may not dare to approach the Lord lest you be found guilty of presumption. But with your eye on mercy you may be bravely trustful. Believe in the great mercy of God, and though your sins be abundant, you will find that the Lord will abundantly pardon; though they blot your character, the Lord will blot them out; though they be red like crimson, yet the precious blood of Jesus will make you whiter than snow.

This story of the Pharisee and the publican is intended as an encouraging example to you. If this man who was *the* sinner found forgiveness, so also shall you if you seek it in the same way. One sinner has speeded so well, why should not you? Come and try for yourself, and see if the Lord does not prove in your case that his mercy endureth for ever.

Next, remember that you may not only find encouragement in looking at the sinner who sought his God, but in the God whom he sought. Sinner, *there is great mercy in the heart of God.* How often did that verse ring out as a chorus in the temple song—

> "For his mercy shall endure
> Ever faithful, ever sure"!

Mercy is a specially glorious attribute of Jehovah, the living God. He is "the Lord God, merciful and gracious." He is "slow to anger and plenteous in mercy." Do you not see how this should cheer you? Sinners are needful if mercy is to be indulged. How can the Lord display his mercy except to the guilty? Goodness is for creatures, but mercy is for sinners. Towards unfallen creatures there may be love, but there cannot be mercy. Angels are not fit recipients of mercy; they do not require it, for they have not transgressed. Mercy comes into exercise after law has been broken; not till then. Among the attributes it is the last which found scope for itself. So to speak, it is the Benjamin, and the darling attribute of God: "He delighteth in mercy." Only to a sinner can God be merciful. Hearest thou this, thou sinner? Be sure that thou catch at it! If there be boundless mercy in the heart of God, and it can only exercise itself towards the guilty, then thou art the man to have it, for thou art a guilty one. Come, then, and let his mercy wrap thee about like a garment this day, and cover all thy shame. Does not God's delight in mercy prove that sinnership is no reason for despair?

Moreover, *the conception of salvation implies hope for sinners.* That salvation which we preach to you every day is glad tidings for the guilty. Salvation by grace implies that men are guilty. Salvation means not the reward of the righteous, but the cleansing of the unrighteous. Salvation is meant for the lost, the ruined, the undone; and the blessings which it brings of pardoning mercy and cleansing grace must be intended for the guilty and polluted. "The whole need not a physician;" the physician has his eye upon the sick. Alms are for the poor, bread is for the hungry, pardon is for the guilty. O you that are guilty, you are the men that mercy seeks after! You

were in God's eye when he sent his Son into the world to save sinners. From the very first inception of redemption to the completion of it the eyes of the great God were set on the guilty, and not on the deserving. The very name of Jesus tells us that he shall save his people from their sins.

Let me further say that, inasmuch as that salvation of God is a great one, it must have been intended to meet great sins. O sirs, would Christ have shed the blood of his heart for some trifling, venial sins which your tears could wash away? Think you God would have given his dear Son to die as a mere superfluity? If sin had been a small matter, a little sacrifice would have sufficed. Think you that the divine atonement was made only for small offences? Did Jesus die for little sins, and leave the great ones unatoned? No, the Lord God measured the greatness of our sin, and found it high as heaven, deep as hell, and broad as the infinite, and therefore he gave so great a Saviour. He gave his only begotten Son, an infinite sacrifice, an unmeasurable atonement. With such throes and pangs of death as never can be fully described the Lord Jesus poured out his soul in unknown sufferings, that he might provide a great salvation for the greatest of sinners. See Jesus on the cross, and learn that all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. The fact of salvation, and of a great salvation, ought to drive away the very notion of despair from every heart that hears of it. Salvation, that is for me, for I am lost. A great salvation, that is for me, for I am the greatest of sinners. Oh, hear my word this day! It is God's word of love, and it rings out like a silver bell. O my beloved hearers, I weep over you, and yet I feel like singing all the time, for I am sent to proclaim salvation from the Lord for the very worst of you.

The gospel is especially, definitely, and distinctly addressed to sinners. Listen to it: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The gospel is like a letter directed in a clear and legible hand; and if you will read its direction, you will find that it runs thus: "TO THE SINNER." O sinners, to you is the word of this salvation sent. If you are a sinner, you are the very man for whom the gospel is intended; and I do not mean by this a merely complimentary nominal sinner, but an out-and-out rebel, a transgressor against God and man. O sinner, seize upon the gospel with joyful alacrity; and cry unto God for mercy at once!

> "'Twas for *sinners* that he suffer'd
> Agonies unspeakable;
> Canst thou doubt thou art a sinner?
> If thou canst—then hope, farewell.
>
> But, believing what is written—
> 'All are guilty'—'dead in sin,'
> Looking to the Crucified One,
> Hope shall rise thy soul within."

If you will think of it again, there must be hope for sinners, for *the great commands of the gospel are most suitable to sinners.* Hear, for instance, this word: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your

sins may be blotted out" (Acts iii. 19). Who can repent but the guilty? Who can be converted but those who are on the wrong track, and therefore need to be turned? The following text is evidently addressed to those who are good for nothing: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The very word "repent" indicates that it is addressed to those who have sinned; let it beckon you to mercy.

Then you are bidden to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, salvation by faith must be for guilty men; for the way of life for the innocent is by perseverance in good works. The law saith, "This do, and live." The gospel talks of salvation by believing, because it is the only way possible for those who have broken the law, and are condemned by it. Salvation is of faith that it might be by grace. Believe and live! Believe and live! Believe and live! This is the jubilee note of the trumpet of free grace. Oh, that you would know the joyful sound, and thus be blessed! Oh, that you that are sinful would hear the call as addressed to you in particular! You are up to your necks in the mire of sin, but a mighty hand is stretched out to deliver you. "Repent ye, and believe the gospel."

If you want any other argument—and I hope you do not—I would put it thus: *great sinners have been saved.* All sorts of sinners are being saved to-day. What wonders some of us have seen! What wonders have been wrought in this Tabernacle! A man was heard at a prayer-meeting pleading in louder tones than usual; he was a sailor, and his voice was pitched to the tune of the roaring billows. A lady whispered to her friend, "Is that Captain F——?" "Yes, said the other, "why do you ask?" "Because," said she, "the last time I heard that voice its swearing made my blood run cold; the man's oaths were beyond measure terrible. Can it be the same man?" Some one observed, "Go and ask him." The lady timidly said, "Are you the same Captain F—— that I heard swearing in the street, outside my house?" "Well," he said, "I am the same person, and yet, thank God, I am not the same!" O brethren, such were some of us; but we are washed, but we are sanctified! Wonders of grace to God belong. I was reading the other day a story of an old shepherd who had never attended a place of worship; but when he had grown grey, and was near to die, he was drawn by curiosity into the Methodist chapel, and all was new to him. Hard-hearted old fellow as he was, he was noticed to shed tears during the sermon. He had obtained a glimpse of hope. He saw that there was mercy even for him. He laid hold on eternal life at once. The surprise was great when he was seen at the chapel, and greater still when, on the Monday night, he was seen at the prayer-meeting; yes, and heard at the prayer-meeting, for he fell down on his knees and praised God that he had found mercy. Do you wonder that the Methodists shouted, "Bless the Lord"? Wherever Christ is preached the most wicked of men and women are made to sit at the Saviour's feet, "clothed, and in their right minds." My hearer, why should it not be so with you? At any rate, we have full proof of the fact that sinnership is no reason for despair.

II. I must now advance to my second observation: A SENSE OF

SINNERSHIP CONFERS NO RIGHT TO MERCY. You will wonder why I mention this self-evident truth; but I must mention it because of a common error which does great mischief. This man was very sensible of his sin insomuch that he called himself THE SINNER; but he did not urge his sense of sin as any reason why he should find mercy. There is an ingenuity in the heart of man, nothing less than devilish, by which he will, if he can, turn the gospel itself into a yoke of bondage. If we preach to sinners that they may come to Christ in all their anguish and misery, one cries—"I do not feel myself to be a sinner as I ought to feel it. I have not felt those convictions of which you speak, and, therefore, I cannot come to Jesus." This is a horrible twist of our meaning. We never meant to insinuate that convictions and doubts and despondencies conferred upon men a claim to mercy, and were necessary preparations for grace. I want you, therefore, to learn that a sense of sin gives no man a right to grace.

If a deep sense of sin entitled men to mercy, *it would be a turning of this parable upside down.* Do you dream that this publican was, after all, a Pharisee differently dressed? Do you imagine that he really meant to plead, "God be merciful to me because I am humble and lowly"? Did he say in his heart, "Lord, have mercy upon me because I am not a Pharisee, and am deeply despondent on account of my evil ways"? This would prove that he was in his heart of hearts a Pharisee. If you make a righteousness out of your feelings, you are just as much out of the true way as if you made a righteousness out of your works. Whether it be work or feeling, anything which is relied upon as a claim for grace is an antichrist. You are no more to be saved because of your conscious miseries than because of your conscious merits; there is no virtue either in the one or in the other. If you make a Saviour of convictions you will be lost as surely as if you made a Saviour out of ceremonies. The publican trusted in divine mercy and not in his own convictions, and you must do the same.

To imagine that an awful sense of sin constituted a claim upon mercy would be *like giving a premium to great sin.* Certain seekers think, "I have never been a drunkard, or a swearer, or unchaste, and I almost wish I had been, that I might feel myself to be the chief of sinners, and so might come to Jesus." Do not wish anything so atrocious; there is no good in sin in any shape or way. Thank God if you have been kept from the grosser forms of vice. Do not imagine that repentance is easier when sin is grosser: the reverse is true. Do believe that there is no advantage in having been a horrible offender. You have sins enough; to be worse would not be better. If good works do not help you, certainly bad works would not. You that have been moral and excellent should cry for mercy, and not be so silly as to dream that greater sins would help you to readier repentance. Come as you are, and if your heart be hard, confess it as one of your greatest sins. A deeper sense of sin would not entitle you to the mercy of God; you can have no title to mercy but that which mercy gives you. Could your tears for ever flow, could your grief no respite know, you would have no claim upon the sovereign grace of God, who will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.

Then, dear friends, remember, if we begin to preach to sinners that

they must have a certain sense of sin and a certain measure of conviction, *such teaching would turn the sinner away from God in Christ to himself.* The man begins at once to say, "Have I a broken heart? Do I feel the burden of sin?" This is only another form of looking to self. Man must not look to himself to find reasons for God's grace. The remedy does not lie in the seat of the disease; it lies in the physician's hand. A sense of sin is not a claim, but a gift of that blessed Saviour who is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins. Beware of any teaching which makes you look to yourself for help, but cling to that doctrine which makes you look alone to Christ. Whether you know it or not, you are a lost, ruined sinner, only fit to be cast into the flames of hell for ever. Confess this, but do not ask to be driven mad by a sense of it. Come to Jesus just as you are, and do not wait for a preparation made out of your own miseries. Look to Jesus, and to him alone.

If we fall into the notion that a certain sense of sin has a claim upon God, *we shall be putting salvation upon other grounds than that of faith,* and that must be a false ground. Now, the ground of salvation is—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." A simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the way of salvation; but to say, "I shall be saved because I am horribly convicted of sin, and driven to desperation," is not to speak like the gospel, but to rave out of the pride of an unbelieving heart. The gospel is that you believe in Christ Jesus; that you get right out of yourself, and depend alone in him. Do you say, "I feel so guilty"? You are certainly guilty, whether you feel it or not; and you are far more guilty than you have any idea of. Come to Christ because you are guilty, not because you have been prepared to come by looking at your guilt. Trust nothing of your own, not even your sense of need. A man may have a sense of disease a long time before he will get healing out of it. The looking-glass of conviction reveals the spots on our face, but it cannot wash them away. You cannot fill your hands by putting them into your empty pocket and feeling how empty it is; it would be far wiser to hold them out, and receive the gold which your friend so freely gives you. "God be merciful to me a sinner" is the right way to put it, and not, "God be merciful to me because I sufficiently feel my sinnership, and most fittingly bewail it."

III. My third observation is this: THE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR SINNERSHIP GUIDES MEN TO RIGHT ACTION. When a man has learned of the Holy Spirit that he is a sinner, then by a kind of instinct of the new life, he does the right thing in the right way. This publican had not often been to the temple, and had not learned the orthodox way of behaving. It is easy to learn how we all do it nowadays in our temples—take off your hat, hold it in front of your face, and read the maker's name and address. Then sit down, and at the proper moment, bend forward and cover your eyes, and, furthermore, stand up when the rest of the congregation do so. People get to do this just as if they were wound up by machinery; yet they do not pray when they are supposed to be praying, nor bow before the Lord when worship is being offered. This publican is out of rank; he does not follow the rubric; he has gestures of his own. First, instead of coming forward he

stands afar off. He does not dare to come where that most respectable person, the Pharisee, is displaying himself, for he does not feel worthy. He leaves space between himself and God, an opening for a Mediator, room for an Advocate, place for an Intercessor to interpose between himself and the throne of the Most High. Wise man thus to stand afar off; for by this means he could safely draw near in the person of Jesus. Furthermore, he would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven. It seems natural to lift up your hands in prayer, but he would not even lift his eyes. The uplifting of the eyes is very proper, is it not? But it was still more proper for "the sinner" not to lift his eyes. His downcast eyes meant much. Our Lord does not say that he could not lift up his eyes, but he *would* not. He could look up, for he did in spirit look up as he cried, "God be merciful to me"; but he would not, because it seemed indecorous for eyes like his to peer into the heaven where dwells the holy God. In the meanwhile, the penitent publican kept smiting upon his breast. The original does not say that he smote upon his breast once, but he smote and smote again. It was a continuous act. He seemed to say—Oh, this wicked heart! He would smite it. Again and again he expressed his intense grief by this Oriental gesture, for he did not know how else to set forth his sorrow. His heart had sinned, and he smote it; his eyes had led him astray, and he made them look down to the earth; and as he himself had sinned by living far off from God, he banished himself far from the manifest Presence. Every gesture and posture is significant, and yet all came spontaneously. He had no book of directions how to behave himself in the house of God; his sincerity guided him. If you want to know how to behave yourselves as penitents, be penitents. The best rubrics of worship are those which are written on broken hearts. I have heard of a minister who was said to cry in the wrong place in his sermons, and it was found afterwards that he had written in the margin of his manuscript, "Weep here." His audience could not see the reason for his artificial moisture. It must have had a ludicrous effect. In religion everything artificial is ridiculous, or worse; but grace in the heart is the best "master of the ceremonies." He who prays aright with his heart will not much err with foot, and hand, and head. If thou wouldst know how to approach God, confess thyself a sinner, and so take thy true place before the God of truth: throw thyself on divine mercy, and thus place God in his true position as thy Judge and Lord.

Observe that this man, even under the weight of conscious sin, was led aright; for *he went straight away to God.* A sense of sin without faith drives us from God, but a sense of sin with faith draws us immediately to God. He came to God alone; he felt that it would be of no avail to confess his fault to a mortal, or to look for absolution from man. He did not resort to the priest of the temple, but to the God of the temple. He did not ask to speak to the good and learned man, the Pharisee, who stood on the same floor with him. His enquiry-room was the secret of his own soul, and he enquired of the Lord. He ran straight away to God, who alone was able to help; and when he opened his mouth, it was "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is what you have to do, my dear hearer, if you would be saved: you must go

distinctly and immediately to God in Christ Jesus. Forget all things else, and say, with the returning prodigal, "I will arise and go to my father." None but God can help us out of our low estate. No mercy but the mercy of God can serve our turn, and none can give us *that* mercy but the God of mercy. Let every broken-down sinner come to his God, against whom he has offended.

The publican did not look round on his fellow-worshippers, he was too much absorbed in his own grief of heart. Specially is it noteworthy that he had no remarks to make upon the Pharisee. He did not denounce the pride, or the hypocrisy, or the hard-heartedness of the professor who so offensively looked down upon him. He did not return contempt for contempt, as we are all too apt to do. No; he dealt with the Lord alone in the deep sincerity of his own heart; and it was well. My hearer, when will you do the same? When will you cease to censure others, and reserve your severity for yourself, your critical observations for your own conduct?

When he came to God it was *with a full confession of sin*—"God be merciful to me a sinner." His very eyes and hands joined with his lips in acknowledging his iniquities. His prayer was wet with the dews of repentance. He poured out his heart before God in the most free and artless manner: his prayer came from the same fountain as that of the prodigal when he said, "Father, I have sinned," and that of David when he cried, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." That is the best praying which comes from the lowliest heart.

Then he appealed to mercy only. This was wise. See how rightly he was guided. What had he to do with justice, since it could only condemn and destroy him? Like a naked sword, it threatens to sheathe itself in my heart; how can I appeal to justice? Neither power nor wisdom, nor any other quality of the great God could be resorted to; only mercy stretched out her wing. The prayer, "God be merciful," is the only prayer that you can pray who have been greatly guilty. If all your lives you have spurned your Saviour, all you can now do is to cast yourselves upon the mercy of God.

The original Greek permits us to see that this man had an eye to the propitiation. I do not say that he fully understood the doctrine of atonement; but still his prayer was, "God be propitiated to me the sinner." He had seen the morning and the evening lamb, and he had heard of the sin-offering; and though he might not have known all about atonement, expiation, and substitution, yet as far as he did know, his eye was turned that way. "O God, be propitiated, accept a sacrifice, and pardon me." If you know your sin, you will be wise to plead the propitiation which God hath set forth for human sin. May the Spirit of God constrain you to trust in Jesus now! The new year is already gliding away; its second month is slipping from under us; how many months are to go before you, a guilty sinner, will come and ask mercy of God, the infinitely-gracious One? Great God, let this day be the day of thy power!

IV. I now close with my last head, which is this—THE BELIEVING CONFESSION OF SINNERSHIP IS THE WAY OF PEACE. "God be merciful to me a sinner," was the prayer, but what was the answer? Listen to

this: "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

In a few sentences let me sketch this man's progress. He came to God only as a sinner, nakedly as a sinner. Observe, he did not say, "God be merciful to me a *penitent* sinner." He was a penitent sinner, but he did not plead his penitence; and if you are ever so penitent and convinced of sin, do not mention it as an argument, lest you be accused of self-righteousness. Come as you are, as a sinner, and as nothing else. Exhibit your wounds. Bring your spiritual poverty before God, and not your supposed wealth. If you have a single penny of your own, get rid of it. Perfect poverty alone will discharge you from your bankruptcy. If you have a mouldy crust in the cupboard of self-righteousness, no bread from heaven will be yours. You must be nothing and nobody if God is to be your all in all. This man does not cry, "God be merciful to me the penitent"; but, "be merciful to me the sinner." He does not even say, "God be merciful to me the *reformed* sinner." I have no doubt he did reform, and give up his evil ways, but he does not plead that reformation. Reformation will not take away your sinnership; therefore do not speak as if it could do so. What you are to be will make no atonement for what you have been. Come, therefore, simply as a sinner, not as a changed and improved sinner. Do not come because you *are* washed, but to be washed! The publican does not say, "God be merciful to me a *praying* sinner." He was praying, but he does not mention it as a plea, for he thought very little of his own prayers. Do not plead your prayers; you might as well plead your sins. God knows that your prayers have sin in them. Why, man, your very tears of repentance need washing! When your supplications are most sincere, what are they but the wailings of a condemned creature who cannot give a single reason why he should not be executed? Feel and own that you deserve condemnation, and come to God as a sinner. Off with your paltry finery, I mean your "filthy rags." Do not trick yourself out in the weeds of your own repentance, much less in the fig-leaves of your own resolutions, but come to God in Christ Jesus in all the nakedness of your sin, and everlasting mercy will cover both you and your sins.

Next, notice that this man did nothing but appeal to mercy: he said, "God be merciful to me." He did not attempt to excuse himself, and say, "Lord, I could not help it. Lord, I was not worse than other publicans. Lord, I was a public servant, and only did what every other tax-collector did." No, no, he is too honest to forge excuses. He is a sinner, and he owns it. If the Lord should condemn him out of his own mouth, and send him to hell, he cannot help it; his sin is too evident to be denied. He lays his head on the block, and humbly pleads, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Neither does this publican offer any *promises* of future amendment as a set-off. He does not say, "Lord, be merciful for the past, and I will be better in the future." Nothing of the sort; "Be merciful to me the sinner" is his one and only request. So would I have you cry, "O God, be merciful to me! Although I am even now condemned, and deserved to be hopelessly damned by thy justice, yet have mercy upon me, have mercy on me now." That is the way to pray; and if you pray in that way God will

hear you. He does not offer to *pay* anything; he does not propose any form of self-paid ransom; he does not present to God his tears, his abstinence, his self-denial, his generosity to the church, his liberality to the poor, or anything else; but simply begs the Lord to be propitiated, and to be merciful to him because of the great sacrifice. Oh, that all of you would at once pray in this fashion!

Now, I want to cheer your hearts by noticing that this man, through this prayer, and through this confession of sin, experienced a remarkable degree of acceptance. He had come up to the temple condemned; "he went down to his house justified." A complete change, a sudden change, a happy change was wrought upon him. Heavy heart and downcast eye were exchanged for glad heart and hopeful outlook. He came into that temple with trembling, he left it with rejoicing. I am sure his wife noticed the difference. What had come over him? The children began to observe it also. Poor father used to sit alone, and heave many a sigh; but all of a sudden he is so happy; he even sings psalms of David out of the latter end of the book. The change was very marked. Before dinner he says, "Children, we must give God thanks before we eat this meal." They gather round and wonder at dear father's happy face as he blesses the God of Israel. He says to his friends, "Brethren, I am comforted; God has had mercy upon me. I went to the temple guilty, but I have returned justified. My sins are all forgiven me. God has accepted a propitiation on my behalf." What good would come of such a happy testimony! This was a very sudden change, was it not? It was wrought in a moment. The process of spiritual quickening is not a matter of hours, but of a single second of time. The processes which lead up to it, and spring out of it, are long, but the actual reception of life must be instantaneous. Not in every case would you be able to put your finger upon that second of time, but the passage from death unto life must be instantaneous. There must be a moment in which the man is dead, and another moment in which he is alive. I grant you, life would be very feeble at first; still, there must be a time in which it was not there at all; and again, there must have been an instant in which it begins. There can be no middle condition between dead and alive. Yet a man may not know *when* the change took place. If you were going to the Cape you might cross the equator at dead of night, and know nothing about it, but still you would cross it. Some poor landsmen have thought that they would see a blue line right across the waves; but it is not perceptible, although it is truly there; the equator is quite as real as if we could see a golden belt around the globe. Dear friends, I want you to cross the line this morning! Oh, that you might go out of this house saying, "Glory, glory, hallelujah! God has had mercy upon me." Though you feel this morning that you would not give twopence for your life, yet if you come to God through Jesus Christ you shall go away blessing God not only that you are alive, but that you shall live for ever, happy in his love.

Once more, this man went away with a witness such as I pray we may all have. "He was justified." "But," you add, "how do I know he was justified?" Listen to these words. Our blessed Lord says, "*I tell you* that this man went down to his house justified rather than

the other." "*I* tell you." Jesus, our Lord, can tell. Into our ear he tells it. He tells it to God and the holy angels, and he tells it to the man himself. The man who has cried from his heart "God be merciful to me a sinner" is a justified man. When he stood and confessed his sin, and cast himself wholly upon the divine mercy, that man was unburdened, so that he went down to his house justified. We are all going down to our houses. Oh, that we might go down justified! You are going home; I want you to go home to God, who is the true home of the soul. "*He* went down to his house justified," and why should not you do the same? Perhaps, my hearer, you have never been to the Tabernacle before. Possibly, my friend, you are one of those gentlemen who spend Sunday mornings in their shirt-sleeves at home reading the weekly paper. You have come here this morning quite by accident. Blessed be God! I hope you will go home "justified." The Lord grant it! Perhaps you always come here, and have occupied a seat ever since the Tabernacle was built, and yet you have never found mercy. Oh, that you might find mercy this morning! Let us seek this blessing. Come with me to Jesus. I will lead the way; I pray you say with me this morning—"God be merciful to me *the* sinner." Rest on the great propitiation: trust in Jesus Christ's atoning blood. Cast yourself upon the Saviour's love, and you shall go down to your house justified. Is it a poor cottage? Is it less than that, a back room up three pairs of stairs? Are you very, very poor, and have you been out of work for a long time? Never mind. God knows all. Seek you his face. It will be a happy Sunday for you, if you this day begin a new life by faith in Jesus. You shall have joy, peace, and happiness if you seek and find mercy from the great Father. I think I see you trudging home, having left your load behind you, but compassed about with songs of praise unto our God. So be it. Amen and Amen.

Confession and Absolution

"And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner "—Luke xviii. 13.

THE heroes of our Saviour's stories are most of them selected to illustrate traits of character entirely dissimilar to their general reputation. What would you think of a moral writer of our own day, should he endeavour in a work of fiction, to set before us the gentle virtue of benevolence by the example of a Sepoy? And yet, Jesus Christ has given us one of the finest examples of charity in the case of a Samaritan. To the Jews, a Samaritan was as proverbial for his bitter animosity against their nation, as the Sepoy is among us for his treacherous cruelty, and as much an object of contempt and hatred; but Jesus Christ, nevertheless, chose his hero from the Samaritans, that there should be nothing adventitious to adorn him, but that all the adorning might be given to the grace of charity. Thus, too, in the present instance, our Saviour, being desirous of setting before us the necessity of humiliation in prayer, has not selected some distinguished saint who was famed for his humility, but he has chosen a tax-gatherer, probably one of the most extortionate of his class, for the Pharisee seems to hint as much ; and I doubt not he cast his eye askance at this publican, when he observed, with self-gratulation, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Still, our Lord, in order that we might see that there was nothing to predispose in the person, but that the acceptance of the prayer might stand out, set even in a brighter light by the black foil of the publican's character, has selected this man to be the pattern and model of one who should offer an acceptable prayer unto God. Note that, and you will not be surprised to find the same characteristic exhibited very frequently in the parables of our Lord Jesus Christ. As for this publican, we know but little of his previous career, but we may, without perilling any serious error, conjecture somewhat near the truth. He may have been, and doubtless he was a Jew, piously brought up and religiously trained, but, perhaps like Levi, he ran away from his parents, and finding no other trade exactly suited to his vicious taste, he became one of that corrupt class who collected the Roman taxes, and, ashamed to be known as Levi any longer, he changed his name to Matthew, lest anyone should recognize in the degraded cast of the publican, the man whose parents feared God, and bowed their knees before Jehovah. It may be that this publican had in his youth forsaken the ways of his fathers, and given himself up to lasciviousness, and then found this unworthy occupation to be most accordant with his vicious spirit. We cannot tell how often he had ground the faces of the poor, or how many curses had been spilled upon his head when he had broken into the heritage of the widow, and had robbed the friendless, unprotected orphan. The Roman government gave a publican far greater power than he ought to possess, and he was never slow to use the advantage for his own enrichment. Probably half of all he had was a robbery, if not more, for Zaccheus seems to hint as much in his own instance, when he says—"Behold, Lord,

the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have gotten anything of any man by false accusation, I restore it unto him four-fold." It was not often that this publican troubled the temple; the priests very seldom saw him coming with a sacrifice; it would have been an abomination, and he did not bring it. But so it happened, that the Spirit of the Lord met with the publican; and had made him think upon his ways, and their peculiar blackness: he was full of trouble, but he kept it to himself, pent up in his own bosom; he could scarcely rest at night, nor go about his business by day, for day and night the hand of God was heavy upon him. At last, unable to endure his misery any longer, he thought of that house of God at Zion, and of the sacrifice that was daily offered there. "To whom, or where should I go," said he, "but to God?—and where can I hope to find mercy, but where the sacrifice is offered?" No sooner said than done. He went; his unaccustomed feet bent their steps to the sanctuary, but he is ashamed to enter. Yon Pharisee, holy man as he appeared to be, goes up unblushingly to the court of the Israelites; he goes as near as he dare to the very precincts, within which the priesthood alone might stand; and he prays with boastful language. But as for the publican, he chooses out for himself some secluded corner where he shall neither be seen nor heard, and now he is about to pray, not with uplifted hands as yonder Pharisee, not with eyes turned up to heaven with a sanctimonious gaze of hypocrisy, but fixing his eyes upon the ground, the hot tears streaming from them, not daring to lift them up to heaven. At last his stifled feelings found utterance; yet that utterance was a groan, a short prayer that must all be comprehended in the compass of a sigh: "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is done; he is heard; the angel of mercy registers his pardon; his conscience is at peace; he goes down to his house a happy man, justified rather than the Pharisee, and rejoicing in the justification that the Lord had given to him. Well then, my business this morning is to invite, to urge, to beseech you to do what the publican did, that you may receive what he obtained. There are two particulars upon which I shall endeavour to speak solemnly and earnestly: the first is *confession*; the second is *absolution*.

I. Brethren, let us imitate the publican, first of all in his CONFESSION. There has been a great deal of public excitement during the last few weeks and months about the confessional. As for that matter, it is perhaps a mercy that the outward and visible sign of Popery in the Church of England has discovered to its sincere friends the inward and spiritual evil which had long been lurking there. We need not imagine that the confessional, or priestcraft, of which it is merely an offshoot, in the Church of England is any novelty: it has long been there; those of us who are outside her borders have long observed and mourned over it; but now we congratulate ourselves on the prospect that the Church of England herself will be compelled to discover her own evils; and we hope that God may give her grace and strength to cut the cancer out of her own breast before she shall cease to be a Protestant Church, and God shall cast her away as an abhorred thing. This morning, however, I have nothing to do with the confessional. Silly women may go on confessing as long as they like, and foolish husbands may trust their wives if they please to such men as those. Let those that are fools show it; let those that have no sense do as they please about it; but as for myself, I should take the greatest care that neither I nor mine have ought to do with such things. Leaving that, however, we come to personal matters, endeavouring to learn, even from the errors of others, how to act rightly ourselves.

Note the publican's confession; *to whom was it presented?* "God be merciful to me a sinner." Did the publican ever think about going to the priest to ask for mercy, and confessing his sins? The thought may have crossed his mind, but his sin was too great a weight upon his conscience to be relieved in any such way, so he very soon dismissed the idea. "No," saith he, "I feel that my sin is of such a character that none but God can take it away; and even if it were right for me to go and make the confession to my fellow creature, yet I should think it must be utterly unavailing in my case, for my disease is of such a nature, that none but an Almighty Physician ever can remove it." So he directs his confession and his prayer to one place, and to one alone—"God be merciful to me a sinner." And you will note in this confession to God, that it was *secret*: all that you can hear of his confession is just that one word—"a sinner." Do you suppose that was all he confessed? No, beloved, I believe that long before this, the publican had made a confession of all his sins privately, upon his knees in his own house before God. But now, in God's house, all he has to say for man to hear, is—"I am a sinner"

And I counsel you, if ever you make a confession before man, let it be a general one but never a particular one. You ought to confess often to your fellow creatures, that you have been a sinner, but to tell to any man in what respect you have been a sinner, is but to sin over again, and to help your fellow creature to transgress. How filthy must be the soul of that priest who makes his ear a common sewer for the filth of other men's hearts. I cannot imagine even the devil to be more depraved, than the man who spends his time in sitting with his ear against the lips of men and women, who, if they do truly confess, must make him an adept in every vice, and school him in iniquities that he otherwise never could have known. Oh, I charge you never pollute your fellow creature; keep your sin to yourself, and to your God; He cannot be polluted by your iniquity; make a plain and full confession of it before him; but to your fellow creature, add nothing to the general confession—"I am a sinner!"

This confession which he made before God, was *spontaneous*. There was no question put to this man as to whether he were a sinner or no; as to whether he had broken the seventh commandment, or the eighth, or the ninth, or the tenth; no, his heart was full of penitence, and it melted out in this breathing—"God be merciful to me a sinner." They tell us that some people never can make a full confession, except a priest helps them by questions. My dear friends, the very excellence of penitence is lost, and its spell broken, if there be a question asked: the confession is not true and real unless it be spontaneous. The man cannot have felt the weight of sin, who wants somebody to tell him what his sins are. Can you imagine any man with a burden on his back, who, before he groaned under it, wanted to be told that he had got one there? Surely not. The man groans under it, and he does not want to be told—"There it is on your back," he knows it is there. And if, by the questioning of a priest, a full and thorough confession could be drawn from any man or woman, it would be totally useless, totally vain before God, because it is not spontaneous. We must confess our sins, because we cannot help confessing them; it must come out, because we cannot keep it in; like fire in the bones, it seems as if it would melt our very spirits, unless we gave vent to the groaning of our confession before the throne of God. See this publican; you cannot hear the abject full confession that he makes; all that you can hear is his simple acknowledgement that he is a sinner; but that comes spontaneously from his lips; God himself has not to ask him the quesstion, but he comes before the throne, and freely surrenders himself up to the hands of Almighty Justice, confessing that he is a rebel and a sinner. That is the first thing we have to note in his confession—that he made it to God secretly and spontaneously; and all he said openly was that he was "a sinner."

Again: *what did he confess?* He confessed, as our text tells us, that he was a sinner. Now, how suitable is this prayer for us! For is there a lip here present that this confession will not suit—"God be merciful to me a sinner?" Do you say,—"the prayer will suit the harlot, when, after a life of sin, rottenness is in her bones, and she is dying in despair—that prayer suits her lips?" Ay, but my friend, it will suit thy lips and mine too. If thou knowest thine heart, and I know mine, the prayer that will suit her will suit us also. You have never committed the sins which the Pharisee disowned; you have neither been extortionate, nor unjust, nor an adulterer; you have never been even as the publican; but nevertheless the word "sinner" will still apply to you; and you will feel it to be so if you are in a right condition. Remember how much *you* have sinned against light. It is true the harlot hath sinned more openly than you, but had she such light as you have had? Do you think she had such an early education and such training as you have received? Did she ever receive such checkings of conscience and such guardings of providence, as those which have watched over your career? This much I must confess for myself—I do, and must feel a peculiar heinousness in my own sin, for I sin against light, against conscience, and more, against the love of God received, and against the mercy of God promised. Come forward, thou greatest among saints, and answer this question,—dost not this prayer suit thee? I hear thee answer, without one moment's pause—"Ay, it suits me now; and until I die, my quivering lips must often repeat the petition, 'Lord have mercy upon me a sinner.'" Men and brethren, I beseech you use this prayer to-day, for it must suit you all. Merchant, hast thou no sins of business to confess? Woman, hast thou no household sins to acknowledge? Child of many prayers, hast thou no offence against father and mother to confess? Have we loved the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength; and have we each loved our

neighbour as ourself. Oh, let us close our lips as to any boasting, and when we open them, let these be the first words that escape from them, "I have sinned, O Lord; I have broken thy commandments; Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner." But mark, is it not a strange thing that the Holy Spirit should teach a man to plead his sinnership before the throne of God? One would think that when we come before God we should try to talk a little of our virtues. Who would suppose that when a man was asking for mercy he would say of himself, "I am a sinner?" Why surely reason would prompt him to say, "Lord have mercy upon me; there is some good point about me: Lord have mercy upon me; I am not worse than my neighbours: Lord have mercy upon me; I will try to be better." Is it not against reason, is it not marvellously above reason, that the Holy Spirit should teach a man to urge at the throne of grace, that which seems to be against his plea, the fact that he is a sinner? And yet, dear brethren, if you and I want to be heard, we must come to Christ as sinners. Do not let us attempt to make ourselves better than we are. When we come to God's throne, let us not for one moment seek to gather any of the false jewels of our pretended virtues; rags are the garments of sinners. Confession is the only music that must come from our lips; "God be merciful to ME—a sinner;" that must be the only character in which I can pray to God. Now, are there not many here who feel that they are sinners, and are groaning, sighing, and lamenting, because the weight of sin lies on their conscience? Brother, I am glad thou feelest thyself to be a sinner, for thou hast the key of the kingdom in thy hands. Thy sense of sinnership is thy only title to mercy. Come, I beseech thee, just as thou art—thy nakedness is thy only claim on heaven's wardrobe; thy hunger is thy only claim on heaven's granaries; thy poverty is thy only claim on heaven's eternal riches. Come just as thou art, with nothing of thine own, except thy sinfulness, and plead that before the throne—"God be merciful to me a sinner." This is what this man confessed, that he was a sinner, and he pleaded it, making the burden of his confession to be the matter of his plea before God.

Now again, *how does he come?* What is the posture that he assumes? The first thing I would have you notice is that he "stood afar off." What did he do that for? Was it not because he felt himself a separated man? We have often made general confessions in the temple, but there never was a confession accepted, except it was particular, personal, and heartfelt. There were the people gathered together for the accustomed service of worship; they join in a psalm of praise, but the poor publican stood far away from them. Anon, they unite in the order of prayer, still he could not go near them. No, he was come there for himself, and he must stand by himself. Like the wounded hart that seeks the deepest glades of the forest where it may bleed and die alone in profound solitude, so did this poor publican seem to feel he must be alone. You notice he does not say anything about other people in his prayer. "God be merciful to *me*," he says. He does not say "one of a company of sinners," but "a sinner," as if there were not another sinner in all the world. Mark this, my hearer, that thou must feel thyself solitary and alone, before thou canst ever pray this prayer acceptably. Has the Lord ever picked thee out in a congregation? Has it seemed to you in this Hall as if there were a great black wall round about you, and you were closed in with the preacher and with your God, and as if every shaft from the preacher's bow was levelled at *you*, and every threatening meant for *you*, and every solemn upbraiding was an upbraiding for *you*? If thou hast felt this, I will congratulate thee. No man ever prayed this prayer aright unless he prayed alone; unless he said "God be merciful to *me*," as a solitary, lonely sinner. "The publican stood afar off."

Note the next thing. "He would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven." That was because he dare not, not because he would not; he would have done it if he dared. How remarkable it is that repentance takes all the daring out of men. We have seen fellows very dare-devils before they were touched by sovereign grace, who have become afterwards, the most trembling and conscientious men with the tenderest conscience that one could imagine. Men who were careless, bragging and defying God, have become as humble as little children, and even afraid to lift their eyes to heaven, though once they sent their oaths and curses there. But why did he not dare to lift his eyes up? It was because he was dejected in his "spirit," so oppressed and burdened that he could not look up. Is that thy case, my friend, this morning? Are you afraid to pray? Do you feel as if you could not hope

that God would have mercy on you; as if the least gleam of hope was more light than you could possibly bear; as if your eyes were so used to the darkness of doubt and despondency, that even one stolen ray seemed to be too much for your poor weak vision? Ah! well, fear not, for happy shall it be for thee; thou art only following the publican in his sad experience now, and the Lord who helps thee to follow him in the confession, shall help thee to rejoice with him in the absolution.

Note what else he did. He smote upon his breast. He was a good theologian; he was a real doctor of divinity. What did he smite his breast for? Because he knew where the mischief lay—in his breast. He did not smite upon his brow as some men do when they are perplexed, as if the mistake were in their understanding. Many a man will blame his understanding, while he will not blame his heart, and say, "Well, I have made a mistake; I have certainly been doing wrong, but I am a good-hearted fellow at the bottom." This man knew where the mischief lay, and he smote the right place.

"Here on my heart the burden lies."

He smote upon his breast as if he were angry with himself. He seemed to say, "Oh! that I could smite thee, my ungrateful heart, the harder, that thou hast loved sin rather than God." He did not do penance, and yet it was a kind of penance upon himself when he smote his breast again and again, and cried "Alas! alas! woe is me that I should ever have sinned against my God—"God be merciful to a sinner." Now, can you come to God like this, my dear friend? Oh, let us all draw near to God in this fashion. Thou hast enough, my brother, to make thee stand alone for there have been sins in which thou and I have stood each of us in solitary guilt. There are iniquities known only to ourselves, which we never told to the partner of our own bosom, not to our own parents or brothers, nor yet to the friend with whom we took sweet counsel. If we have sinned thus alone, let us go to our chambers, and confess alone, the husband apart, and the wife apart, the father apart, and the child apart. Let us each one wail for himself. Men and brethren, leave off to accuse one another. Cease from the bickerings of your censoriousness, and from the slanders of your envy. Rebuke yourselves and not your fellows. Rend your own hearts, and not the reputation of your neighbours. Come, let each man now look to his own case, and not to the case of another; let each cry, "Lord, have mercy upon *me*, as here I stand alone, a sinner." And hast thou not good reason to cast down thine eyes? Does it not seem sometimes too much for us ever to look to heaven again. We have blasphemed God, some of us, and even imprecated curses on our own limbs and eyes; and when those things come back to our memory we may well be ashamed to look up. Or if we have been preserved from the crime of open blasphemy—how often have you and I forgotten God! how often have we neglected prayer! how have we broken his Sabbaths and left his Bible unread! Surely these things, as they flash across our memory, might constrain us to feel that we cannot lift up so much as our eyes towards heaven. And as for smiting on our breast, what man is there among us that need not do it? Let us be angry with ourselves, because we have provoked God to be angry with us. Let us be in wrath with the sins that have brought ruin upon our souls; let us drag the traitors out, and put them at once to a summary death; they deserve it well; they have been our ruin; let us be their destruction. He smote upon his breast and said, "God, be merciful unto me a sinner."

There is one other feature in this man's prayer, which you must not overlook. *What reason had he to expect that God would have any mercy upon him?* The Greek explains more to us than the English does; and the original word here might be translated—"God be *propitiated* to me a sinner." There is in the Greek word a distinct reference to the doctrine of atonement. It is not the Unitarian's prayer—"God be merciful to me;" it is more than that—it is the Christian's prayer, "God be propitiated towards me, a sinner." There is, I repeat it, a distinct appeal to the atonement and the mercy-seat in this short prayer. Friend, if we would come before God with our confessions, we must take care that we plead the blood of Christ. There is no hope for a poor sinner apart from the cross of Jesus. We may cry, "God be merciful to me," but the prayer can never be answered apart from the victim offered, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. When thou hast thine eye upon the mercy-seat, take care to have

thine eye upon the cross too. Remember that the cross is, after all, the mercy-seat; that mercy never was enthroned, until she did hang upon the cross crowned with thorns. If thou wouldst find pardon, go to dark Gethsemane, and see thy Redeemer sweating, in deep anguish, gouts of gore. If thou wouldst have peace of conscience, go to Gabbatha, the pavement, and see thy Saviour's back flooded with a stream of blood. If thou wouldst have the last best rest to thy conscience, go to Golgotha; see the murdered victim as he hangs upon the cross, with hands and feet and side all pierced, as every wound is gaping wide with misery extreme. There can be no hope for mercy apart from the victim offered—even Jesus Christ the Son of God. Oh, come; let us one and all approach the mercy-seat, and plead the blood. Let us each go and say, "Father, I have sinned; but have mercy upon me, through thy Son." Come, drunkard, give me thy hand; we will go together. Harlot, give me thy hand too; and let us likewise approach the throne. And you, professing Christians, come ye also, be not ashamed of your company. Let us come before his presence with many tears, none of us accusing our fellows, but each one accusing himself; and let us plead the blood of Jesus Christ, which speaketh peace and pardon to every troubled conscience.

Careless man, I have a word with thee before I have done on this point. You say, "Well, that is a good prayer, certainly, for a man who is dying. When a poor fellow has the cholera, and sees black death staring him in the face, or when he is terrified and thunderstruck in the time of storm, or when he finds himself amidst the terrible confusion and alarm of a perilous catastrophe or a sudden accident, while drawing near to the gates of death, it is only right that he should say, Lord, have mercy upon me." Ah, friend, the prayer must be suitable to you then, if you are a dying man; it must be suitable to you, for you know not how near you are to the borders of the grave. Oh, if thou didst but understand the frailty of life, and the slipperiness of that poor prop on which thou art resting, thou wouldst say, "Alas for *my* soul! if the prayer will suit me dying, it must suit me now; for I am dying, even this day, and know not when I may come to the last gasp." "Oh," says one, "I think it will suit a man that has been a very great sinner." Correct, my friend, and therefore, if you knew yourself, it would suit you. You are quite correct in saying, that it won't suit any but great sinners; and if you don't feel yourself to be a great sinner, I know you will never pray it. But there are some here that feel themselves to be what you ought to feel and know that you are. Such will, constrained by grace, use the prayer with an emphasis this morning, putting a tear upon each letter, and a sigh upon each syllable, as they cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." But mark, my friend; thou mayest smile contemptuously on the man that makes this confession, but he shall go from this house justified, while thou shalt go away still in thy sins, without a hope, without a ray of joy to cheer thy unchastened spirit.

II. Having thus briefly described this confession, I comemore briefly still to notice the ABSOLUTION which God gave. Absolution from the lips of man I do believe is little short of blasphemy. There is in the Prayer Book of the Church of England an absolution which is essentially Popish, which I should think must be almost a verbatim extract from the Romish missal. I do not hesitate to say, that there was never anything more blasphemous printed in Holywell Street, than the absolution that is to be pronounced by a clergyman over a dying man; and it is positively frightful to think that any persons calling themselves Christians should rest easy in a church until they have done their utmost to get that most excellent book thoroughly reformed and revised, and to get the Popery purged out of it. But there is such a thing as absolution, my friends, and the publican received it. "He went to his house justified rather than the other." The other had nought of peace revealed to his heart; this poor man had all, and he went to his house justified. It does not say that he went to his house, having eased his mind; that is true, but more: he went to his house "justified." What does that mean? It so happens that the Greek word here used is the one which the apostle Paul always employs to set out the great doctrine of the righteousness of Jesus Christ—even the righteousness which is of God by faith. The fact is, that the moment the man prayed the prayer, every sin he had ever done was blotted out of God's book, so that it did not stand on the record against him; and more, the moment that prayer was heard in heaven, the man was reckoned to be a righteous man. All that Christ did for him was cast about his shoulders to be the robe of his beauty, that moment all the guilt that he had ever committed himself was washed entirely away and

lost for ever. When a sinner believes in Christ, his sins positively cease to be, and what is *more* wonderful they *all* cease to be, as Kent says in those well known lines—

"Here's pardon for transgressions past,
It matters not how black their cast,
And, O my soul with wonder view,
For sins to come here's pardon too."

They are all swept away in one solitary instant; the crimes of many years; extortions, adulteries, or even murder, wiped away in an instant; for you will notice the absolution was instantaneously given. God did not say to the man—"Now you must go and perform some good works, and then I will give you absolution." He did not say as the Pope does, "Now you must swelter awhile in the fires of Purgatory, and then I will let you out." No, he justified him there and then; the pardon was given as soon as the sin was confessed. "Go, my son, in peace; I have not a charge against thee; thou art a sinner in thine own estimation, but thou art none in mine; I have taken all thy sins away, and cast them into the depth of the sea, and they shall be mentioned against thee no more for ever." Can you tell what a happy man the publican was, when all in a moment he was changed? If you may reverse the figure used by Milton, he seemed himself to have been a loathsome toad, but the touch of the Father's mercy made him rise to angelic brightness and delight; and he went out of that house with his eye upward, no longer afraid. Instead of the groan that was on his heart, he had a song upon his lip. He no longer walked alone; he sought out the godly and he said, "Come and hear, ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul." He did not smite upon his breast, but he went home to get down his harp, and play upon the strings, and praise his God. You would not have known that he was the same man, if you had seen him going out; and all that was done in a minute. "But," says one, "do you think he knew for certain that all his sins were forgiven? Can a man know that?" Certainly he can. And there be some here that can bear witness that this is true. They have known it themselves. The pardon which is sealed in heaven is re-sealed in our own conscience. The mercy which is recorded above is made to shed its light into the darkness of our hearts. Yes, a man may know on earth that his sins are forgiven, and may be as sure that he is a pardoned man as he is of his own existence. And now I hear a cry from some one saying, "And may I be pardoned this morning? and may I know that I am pardoned? May I be so pardoned that all shall be forgotten—I who have been a drunkard, a swearer, or what not? May I have all my transgressions washed away? May I be made sure of heaven, and all that in a moment?" Yes, my friend, if thou believest in the Lord Jesus Christ, if thou wilt stand where thou art, and just breathe this prayer out, "Lord, have mercy! God be merciful to me a sinner, through the blood of Christ." I tell thee man, God never did deny that prayer yet; if it came out of honest lips he never shut the gates of mercy on it. It is a solemn litany that shall be used as long as time shall last, and it shall pierce the ears of God as long as there is a sinner to use it. Come, be not afraid, I beseech you, use the prayer before you leave this Hall. Stand where you are; endeavour to realize that you are all alone, and if you feel that you are guilty, now let the prayer ascend. Oh, what a marvellous thing, if from the thousands of hearts here present, so many thousand prayers might go up to God! Surely the angels themselves never had such a day in Paradise, as they would have to-day, if every one of us could unfeignedly make that confession. Some are doing it; I know they are; God is helping them. And sinner, do you stay away? You, who have most need to come, do you refuse to join with us. Come, brother come. You say you are too vile. No, brother, you cannot be too vile to say, "God be merciful to *me*." Perhaps you are no viler than we are; at any rate, this we can say—we feel ourselves to be viler than you, and we want you to pray the same prayer that we have prayed. "Ah," says one, "I cannot; my heart won't yield to that; I cannot." But friend, if God is ready to have mercy upon thee, thine must be a hard heart, if it is not ready to receive his mercy. Spirit of God, breathe on the hard heart, and melt it now! Help the man who feels that carelessness is overcoming him—help him to get rid of it from this hour. You are struggling against it; you are saying, "Would to God I could pray that I could go back to be a boy or a child again, and then I could; but I have got hardened and grown grey in sin, and prayer would be hypocrisy

in me. No, brother, no, it would not. If thou canst but cry it from thy heart, I beseech thee say it. Many a man thinks he is a hypocrite, when he is not, and is afraid that he is not sincere, when his very fear is a proof of his sincerity. "But," says one, "I have no redeeming trait in my character at all." I am glad you think so; still you may use the prayer, "God be merciful to me." "But it will be a useless prayer," says one. My brother, I assure thee, not in my own name, but in the name of God, my Father and your Father, it shall not be a useless prayer. As sure as God is God, him that cometh unto Christ he will in no wise cast out. Come with me now, I beseech thee; tarry no longer; the bowels of God are yearning over thee. Thou art his child, and he will not give thee up. Thou hast run from him these many years, but he has never forgotten thee; thou hast resisted all his warnings until now, and he is almost weary, but still he has said concerning thee, "How shall I make thee as Admah; how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

"Come humbled sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve;
Come with thy guilt and fear oppressed,
And make this last resolve:

I'll go to Jesus; though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose,
I know his courts; I'll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.

Prostrate I'll lie before his face,
And there my sins confess;
I'll tell him I'm a wretch undone,
Without his sov'reign grace."

Go home to your houses: let everyone—preacher, deacon, people, ye of the church, and ye of the world, everyone of you, go home, and ere you feast your bodies, pour out your hearts before God, and let this one cry go up from all our lips, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

I pause. Bear with me.

I must detain you a few moments. Let us use this prayer as our own *now*. Oh that it might come up before the Lord at this time as the earnest supplication of every heart in this assembly! I will repeat it,—not as a text, but as a prayer,—as my own prayer; as your prayer. Will each one of you take it personally for himself? Let everyone, I entreat you, who desires to offer the prayer, and can join in it, utter at its close an audible "Amen."

Let us pray.

"GOD-BE-MERCIFUL-TO-ME-A-SINNER."

[*And the people did with deep solemnity say*] "AMEN."

P.S.—The preacher hopes that he who reads will feel constrained most solemnly to do likewise.

The Servants and the Pounds

"A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come"—Luke xix. 12, 13.

WE are told the reason for the Saviour's delivering this parable at this particular time. He was going up to Jerusalem, and the ignorant and enthusiastic crowd hoped that he might now set up a temporal sovereignty. "They thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." Their minds were crowded with mistakes, and the Saviour would set them right upon this matter. To banish from their minds the idea of a Jewish empire, in which every Hebrew would be a prince, our Lord told them this story: I use the word advisedly, for his parable was also a fact. He would show them that as yet they were not to be partakers in a kingdom, but were soon to be waiters for an absent Lord who had gone to receive a kingdom, and to return. In his absence his disciples were to be in the position of servants put in trust with property while their master was gone far away to receive a kingdom, and then to come again. He was now like a nobleman, who may be one among many citizens; but he was going away to a court where he would be invested with royal authority, and he would come back a king. They were to be put in trust with certain pounds till he should return.

I confess I never thoroughly saw the meaning of this parable till I was directed by an eminent expositor to a passage in Josephus, which, if it be not the key of it, is a wonderfully close example of a class of facts which, no doubt, often occurred in the Roman empire in our Saviour's day. Herod, you know, was king over Judæa; but he was only a subordinate king under the Roman emperor. Cæsar at Rome made and unmade kings at his pleasure. When Herod died he was followed by his son Archelaus, of whom we read in Matthew's account of our Lord's infancy that when Joseph heard that Archelaus was king in Judæa in the room of his father Herod he was afraid to go thither. This Archelaus had no right to the throne till he obtained the sanction of Cæsar, and therefore he took ship with certain attendants, and went to Rome, which in those days was a far country, that he might receive

the kingdom, and return. While he was on the way his citizens, who hated him, sent an ambassage after him, so has the Revised Version correctly worded it; and this ambassage bore this message to Cæsar:—"We will not that this man reign over us." The messengers represented to Cæsar that Archelaus was not fit to be king of the Jews. Certain of the pleadings are recorded in Josephus, and they show that barristers nineteen hundred years ago pleaded in much the same style as their brethren of to-day. The people were weary of the Herods, and preferred anything to their cruel rule. They even asked that Judæa might become a Roman province, and be joined to Syria, rather than they should remain under the hated yoke of the Idumean tyrants. It is evident that in the case of Archelaus his citizens hated him, and said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." It pleased Cæsar to divide the kingdom, and to put Archelaus on the throne as ethnarch, or a ruler with less power than a king. When he returned he took fierce revenge upon those who had opposed him, and rewarded his faithful adherents most liberally. This story of what had been done thirty years before would, no doubt, rise up in the recollection of the people when Jesus spoke, for Archelaus had built a palace for himself very near to Jericho, and it may be that under the walls of that palace the Saviour used the event as the basis of his parable. Those who lived in our Lord's day must have understood his allusions to current facts much better than we do who live nineteen centuries later. The providence of God provided that observant Jew, Josephus, to store up much valuable information for us. Read the passage in his history, and you will see that even the details tally with this parable. There is the story.

The Saviour, without excusing Archelaus or commending him in the least degree, simply makes his going to Rome an illustration. Here is a noble personage who is to be a king; but to obtain the throne he must journey to the distant court of a superior power. While he is going, his citizens so hate him that they send an ambassage to oppose his claims; for they will not have him for their king. However, he receives the kingdom, and returns to rule it. When he does so, he rewards those who have been faithful to him, and he punishes with overwhelming destruction those who have tried to prevent his reigning. There is the story: let me further interpret it.

The Saviour likens himself to a nobleman. He was here on earth a man among men, and truly a nobleman in the midst of his fellow-citizens. It was his to become king, king of all the earth: indeed, he is such by nature and by right, but he must first go, by death, resurrection, and ascension, away to the highest courts, and there from the great Lord of all he must receive for himself a kingdom. It is written, "Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance"; and therefore Jesus must plead his claims before the king, and win his suit. The day is coming when he will return, clothed with glory and honour, to take unto himself his great power and reign; for he must reign till all enemies are put under his feet. When he comes his enemies will be destroyed, and his faithful servants will be abundantly rewarded.

Let us now draw near to this feast of divine teaching. May the Spirit of God help us to gather practical lessons from this parable!

I. First, I invite you to notice that THERE ARE HERE TWO SETS

OF PERSONS. We see the enemies who would not have this man to reign over them, and the servants who had to trade with his money. There are many divisions among men into nationalities, ranks, offices, and characters; but, after all, the deep divisions will always be two—the enemies and the servants of Christ Jesus. You that are not servants are enemies; you that are not enemies must take care that you are servants. I find no class of persons mentioned in the parable but these two, and I feel certain that there are no others on the face of the earth. You are all either enemies or servants of Jesus.

Consider *the enemies!* The person hated was a nobleman. He was a man, but a noble man. What a man is the Lord Jesus! Forgetting his Godhead for the moment, regard him only as the man Christ Jesus; and what a man! I need not dwell upon the nobility of his birth, of the seed of David; but I would remind you of the nobility of his character, for that is where true nobility resides. In this respect where is there nobility to be compared to his? Brothers, it would be difficult to find a second to the man Christ within measurable distance of him: even those who copy him most nearly confess, regretfully, that in many things they fall short of his glory. There was nothing petty, mean, or selfish about Jesus of Nazareth. He was altogether the noble man.

He deigned, for gracious purposes, to become a citizen amongst others; for since we read of his being anointed above his fellows, it is implied that some were his fellows. He was a man among men. He was of the society of carpenters; he was also free of the company of itinerant preachers. He associated with men of the sea, with men that handled the net and the oar. He went in and out among the peasantry, and in his dress and style of living there was nothing to distinguish him from the rest of the citizens. Truly, he was separate from them by his holier character, but the separation was not caused by his unwillingness to come down to them, but by their inability to go up to him.

The citizens hated him; but they hated him without a cause. There is always some cause for dislike in us, but there was none in him. In tone, or manner, or spirit, the best give some cause of offence; but in him there was nothing which could excuse their hate: it was a wanton rejection of the fittest to reign.

As he claimed to be the King of the Jews, they especially hated his royalty, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; and again, "We have no king but Cæsar." "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Yet, my brethren, merely regarding Jesus as a man, if we wanted a king, he ought to be elected by the universal suffrages of mankind, openly given by uplifted hands and joyful acclamations. *Io triumphe!* Mighty Conqueror, reign for ever! Prince of the kings of the earth, lover of the sons of men, who didst for our sake pour out thy precious blood, thou deservest to be king of all! The most kingly of men should be king of men. Yet they hated his royal claims, and this also without cause. Which of them had he oppressed? What revenue did he extort from the people? What law of his was hard or cruel? In what case did he ever judge unrighteously? Yet his citizens hated him. There is that same hate of Christ in the world to-day. Do any of you hate him? "No," say you. Yet are not some of you who do not oppose him treating him with greater contempt than if you did oppose

him? You pass him by altogether, he is not in all your thoughts; you act as if he were not worthy even to be opposed: you make nothing of him. He is not among the objects for which you live. Sometimes you may speak with a partial admiration of his character; but earnest admiration leads to imitation. If Jesus be a Saviour, what worse can you do to him than to refuse to be saved by him? I charge you indifferent ones with being, in the core of your hearts, his worst enemies. Oh that you would repent of this, and turn unto him, for he is coming again; and when he comes he will say, "As for these mine enemies, slay them before mine eyes." The expression is full of terror. To be slain before the eyes of injured love is doubly death. The Lord by his grace deliver us from so dread a doom!

The other set of persons were *his servants:* the original would justify the translation, his bond-servants. Those who were not his enemies were his faithful servants. I suppose that the nobleman had bought them with his money, or that they had been born in his house, or that they had willingly bound themselves by indentures to him. When I said that these were only his slaves you inwardly said, "Then you that believe in Jesus are his bond-servants." Spare us not even the harsher word "slaves." We were never free till we came under bonds to Jesus, and we grow in freedom as we yield to him. Paul said, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," as if the hot iron of affliction had branded him with the name of Christ. Yes, we are the property of the Lord Jesus, and not our own. We cannot somehow find words which will in all its fulness express our belonging to Jesus; we wish to sink into Christ, and to become as nothing for his sake. Truly he hath called us friends, but we call ourselves his servants. We take a great delight in owning him as Master: like David, who said, "I am thy servant"; and then again, "I am thy servant"; and then again, "and the son of thine handmaid." He was born a servant, born of a mother who was also herself a servant. After all this he added, "thou hast loosed my bonds." Servitude to Christ is perfect freedom, and in every respect we have found it so. We never expect to know perfect freedom until he has brought every thought, every conception, imagination, desire, into captivity to himself. We have been bought with his money, and we cost him dear. We have also been born in his house by a second birth, and we are bound to him by indentures which we have gladly signed and sealed, and are ready to sign and seal again.

> "High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
> That vow renew'd shall daily hear:
> Till in life's latest hour we bow,
> And bless in death a bond so dear."

We are truly thus on the opposite side to his enemies, for we are willingly his servants.

I have thus introduced to you the two classes. Before we go any further, may the Holy Spirit operate upon us, to make us discern to which of these two we belong! If we are enemies, may we become servants from this time forth!

II. We now advance a step further, and notice THE ENGAGEMENTS OF THESE SERVANTS. Their lord was going away, and he left his ten

servants in charge with a little capital, with which they were to trade for him till he returned. He did not tell them how long he would be away, perhaps he did not know himself—I mean the king in the story: even our Master says, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven." "I am going away," he said, "you are my servants, and I leave you as my servants in the midst of my enemies. Be loyal to me; and, to prove your faithfulness, continue to trade in my name. I shall entrust to each of you a very small sum of money, but it will keep you occupied, and your trading on my account will be your daily protest that you are loyal to me, whatever others may be."

Notice, first, that *this was honourable work.* They were not entrusted with large funds, but the amount was enough to serve as a test. It put them upon their honour. If they were really attached to their master they would feel that he had placed a confidence in them which they must justify. Slaves are not always to be entrusted with money; in fact, the tendency of bondage has been always to take away from men the quality of trustworthiness: our bondage to Christ has the opposite effect, because it is no bondage at all. These servants of the master were treated in some respect as partners, they were to have fellowship with him in his property. They were his confidants and trustees. His eye was not watching them, for he had gone into a far country, and he trusted them to be a law unto themselves. They were not to render a daily account, but to be left alone until he returned. Now that is just how the Master has treated us: he has put us in trust with the gospel, and he relies upon our honour. He does not call us at once to an audit, for he is not here. I do not think that systems of church government which involve a measure of the spy system are at all after our Lord's mind. If Christians are what they ought to be, they can be trusted: they are a law unto themselves. The Lord puts you not under certain rules and regulations so as to ordain that you shall give a tenth, though I wish you did give as much at least. He does not say, "You shall subscribe so much at such a time, and work in such a way." No; you are not under law, but under grace. If you love your Master you will soon discover what to do for him, and you will do it with delight. The Lord does not lay down rigid rules, and order that at such an hour in the morning you must begin work, and that you must work on for so many hours. No, he says, "Take my pound, and trade therewith." Our version, "Occupy till I come," is a lumbering Latin way of saying, "Trade therewith till I come." The Lord has put us on the footing of confidence, appealing to our honour and love. He will not come and look after us to-day or to-morrow, though he will ultimately have a strict reckoning with us. Meanwhile he has gone, but he has left us here in the midst of his enemies, to show his enemies that he has some friends, and that he must be a good Master, since even those who own themselves to be his vassals rejoice to spend their whole lives in his service. I say he gave them honourable work; and was it not so?

It was work for which he gave them capital. He gave to each of them a pound. "Not much," you will say. No, he did not intend it to be much. They were not capable of managing very much. If he found them faithful in "a very little" he could then raise them to a higher responsibility. I do not read that any one of them complained of the

smallness of his capital, or wished to have it doubled. Brothers, we need not ask for more talents, we have quite as many as we shall be able to answer for. Preachers need not seek for larger spheres: let them be faithful in those which they now occupy. A brother said to me, "I cannot do much with a hundred hearers," and I replied, "You will find it hard work to give in a good account for even a hundred people." I confess it very quietly, but I have often wished that I had a little congregation, that I might watch over every soul in it; but now I am doomed to an everlasting dissatisfaction with my work, for what am I among so many? I can only feel that I have not even begun to do the hundredth part of what needs to be done in such a church as this. Each one had a pound in his hand, and his lord only said, "Trade therewith." He did not expect them to do a wholesale business on so small a stock, but they were to trade as the market would allow. He did not expect them to make more than the pound would fairly bring in; for, after all, he was not "an austere man." "Take that pound," he said, "and do your best. I know the times are bad, for you have to trade among enemies. You could not, perhaps, manage to put out twenty pounds under such circumstances, but you can turn over a pound, and use every shilling of it." Thus he gave them a sufficient capital for his purpose. My friend, have you that pound anywhere about you? "Alas!" says one, "I have no abilities at all." How is that? Your Lord gave you a pound; what has become of it? You are one of his servants, and if you are doing nothing you are in an evil case, and ought to be ashamed. What have you done with that pound? Put your hand in your pocket again. It is not there. Is it in the napkin? —that napkin with which you ought to have wiped the sweat of labour from your brow! Have you got that pound? You say, "It is not much." The Master did not say it was much, on the contrary, he called it "very little"; but have you used that very little? This should go home to your consciences. You have been treated as confidential servants, and yet you are not true to your Lord. How is this?

What they had to do with the pound was prescribed in general terms. They were to trade with it, not to play with it. I dare say they were inclined to argue, "Our master's cause is assailed, let us fight for him"; yet he did not say, "fight," but *trade*. Peter drew his sword. Oh, yes, we are eager combatants, but slow merchants. Many manifest a defiant spirit, and are never more satisfied than when they are in noise and strife. The servants in this parable were not to fight, but to trade, which is a much more cool-blooded and ignoble thing in common esteem. We may leave our Lord's enemies to himself; he will end their rebellions one of these days. We are to follow a much lowlier line of things.

No doubt certain of them might have thought that the pound would be useful to purchase them comforts, or even luxuries: one would buy a new coat, and another would bring home a piece of furniture for his house, and others would solemnly say, "We have our families to think of." Yes, but their lord did not say so; the master said, "Trade therewith until I come." They were neither to fight with it, nor hoard it, nor spend it, nor waste it, but to trade with it for him.

The pound was not put into their hands for display. They were not to glory over others who had not so much as a penny to bless themselves

with; for though they were little capitalists, that capital was their lord's. It is a pity when graces or talents are boasted of as if they were our own. A tradesman who is prospering seldom has much money to show; it is all wanted in his business. Sometimes he can scarcely put his hand upon a five-pound note, because his cash is all absorbed: his golden grain is all sown in the field of his trade. Speaking for myself, I cannot find any room for glorying in myself; for if I have either grace or strength, I certainly have none to spare. I have barely enough for the work in hand, and not enough for the service in prospect. Our pound is not to be hung on our watch-chain, but to be traded with.

Trading represents a life which may be called common-place; but it is eminently practical: and it has an exceedingly practical effect upon the person engaged in it. This is owing in part to the fact that it is an occupation in which there is great *scope for judgment.* They were not tied down to a special kind of trade. The man who made his one pound into ten chose the best form of business. He sought not that which was most pleasant, but that which was most profitable. So you are left, dear friends, to choose your own line of service for your Master, only you must trade for him, and for him everything must be done well. At the present time no trading pays better than the mission to the Congo, or to the hill-tribes of India: large dividends come also from dealings with the poorest of the poor in the slums, and as much from widows and orphans who are in extreme destitution. When men have to lay down their lives for the Lord Jesus, after a life languished away with fever, the returns are amazing. Where the need is greatest our Lord receives most glory. It is left to you to judge what you can do, how you can do it, and where you will do it. Do that which will most surely win souls, and that which will best establish your Lord's kingdom. Exercise your very best judgment, and get into that line of holy service in which you can bring in the largest revenue for your glorious Master.

The work which he prescribed was *one that would bring them out.* The man who never succeeds in trade, do you know him? I know him. He complains that he has a small head; and usually the complaint is founded on fact. He needs to follow a business in which the bread and butter will be brought to his door ready spread; and even then, unless it is cut up into dice pieces on his plate, he will get no breakfast. The man that is to succeed in trade in these times must have confidence, look alive, keep his eyes open, and be all there. Our times are hard, but not so hard as those described in the parable when the faithful servants were trading in the midst of traitors; they had need of sharp wits. Trade develops a man's perseverance, patience, and courage: it tests honesty, truthfulness, and firmness. It is a singularly excellent discipline for character. When this nobleman gave his servant the pound, it was that he might see what stuff he was made of. Trade with small capital means personal work and drudgery, long hours and few holidays; plenty of disappointment and small gains. It means working with might and main, and doing the thing with all your heart and mind. In such a manner are we to serve Christ. The word "trade" has a world of meaning in it. I cannot bring it out this morning; but there is no need, for the most of you know more about trade than I do, and you can instruct yourselves. You are to trade for the

Lord Jesus Christ in a higher and yet more emphatic sense than that in which you have traded for yourselves. With your physical strength, your mental faculties, your substance, your family, with everything—you are to bring glory to God, and honour to the name of Jesus. It is to be your life-business to work *for* Jesus, and *with* Jesus.

Trading, if it be successfully carried on, is *an engrossing concern*, calling out the whole man. It is a continuous toil, a varied trial, a remarkable test, a valuable discipline, and this is why the nobleman put his bondsmen to it, that he might afterwards use them in still higher service. Brethren, learn what is meant by trading, and then carry on a spiritual trade with all your heart.

At the same time, let us notice that *it was work suitable to their capacity*. Small as the capital was, it was enough for them; for they were no more than bondsmen, not of a high grade of rank or education. Their master gave them only a pound, which did not mean more than £3 10s. of our money. One would not get a large shop, or even a decent stock, with that small amount. They could not complain that they were placed in a business which was too heavy for them to manage. They could any of them buy a few goods, and hawk them. The Lord Jesus Christ does not ask you to do more than you can do; he does not break you down with cares beyond your capacity. We have not yet reached the limit of our powers: we can yet do more. Jesus is no exacting master; it is only a false and lying servant who will call him "an austere man, reaping where he has not sowed." Nothing of the kind. He has given us a light business: our work for him is suited to our limited powers, and he is ready, by his Holy Spirit, to assist us. Let us use well our single pound. Let it be our ambition to make ten of it at the very least; and may the Lord graciously prosper our endeavours, that we may have large interest to present to him when he shall come!

Did you enquire as to how these men were to be supported? Their master did not tell them to live out of his pound. No, they were his servants, and so they lived under his roof, and he provided for all their needs. He had gone on a journey, but his establishment was not given up: the table was still spread, and the children and the servants had bread enough and to spare. "Oh," says one, "that alters the case." Just so, but it does not make it different from yours; or, if it does, I am sorry for you. Are you your own provider? Do you cry, "What shall I eat? What shall I drink?" Do you not know that all these things do the nations of the earth seek after? Whereas Jesus says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." As I understand my life, I am to do my Lord's work, and he is to provide for me. He may do this through my own industry, but still it is *his* work to do it, and not mine. If the providence of God is not sufficient to provide for us, then I am sure we cannot provide for ourselves; and if it be sufficient, we shall be wise to cast all our care on the Lord, and live undividedly for his praise. Remember that text, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." You, as a servant, are not to be entangled with carking cares about your own interests, but you are to give your whole thought and life to your Master's service. He will take care of you now, and reward you when he shall come.

III. Thirdly, to understand this parable, we must remember THE EXPECTANCY WHICH WAS ALWAYS TO INFLUENCE THEM. They were left as trusted servants till he should return, but that return was a main item in the matter.

They were to believe that *he would return*, and that he would return a king. The citizens did not believe it. They hoped that Cæsar would refuse him the throne; but we are to be sure that our noble Master will receive the kingdom. This rebel world does not believe that Jesus ever will be king. The other day we read of the "Eclipse of Christianity." Constantly we see his dominion assailed. They say that it is practically disproved by facts. Is it? Sirs, excuse me, I am desperately prejudiced, for I am his servant. I owe him my life, my all. I am persuaded that he is and must be King of kings. I know him so well that I am sure that he will prevail at the court to which he has gone. He is in very high favour there. The last time I saw the face of the great King I obtained that favour through the use of his name. I receive anything I ask for when I mention his name, and so I am sure that he is in wonderful high repute above. Why, his Father is the sovereign! I am sure he will not deny the kingdom to his only-begotten Son. Jesus will come in his kingdom; I am sure of it. Let us work in the full conviction that our absent Lord will soon be here again, with a glorious diadem upon his brow. When he went away he took with him the scars of one who died a felon's death; and he will come again with them, but the nail-prints will be no memorials of his shame: they will be as jewels to his hands.

His servants were to regard their absent master as *already king*, and they were so to trade among his enemies that they should never compromise their own loyalty. They were of the king's party, and of no other. It is a very awkward position to be in, to trade among people that are enemies to your king: you need in such a case to be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. This is precisely our position. We have to bring glory to God out of men who hate him: we have to magnify our Lord among men who would, if they could, again crucify him. We have to go in and out among them in such a manner that they can never say that we side with them in their rebellion, or wink at their disloyalty. We cannot be "Hail fellow: well met!" with those whose life is a practical insult to the crown rights of King Jesus. We must above all things prove ourselves loyal to our absent Lord, lest he appoint us our portion among his enemies.

I find that the original would suggest to any one carefully reading it that they were to regard their master as *already returning*. This should be our view of our Lord's Advent; he is even now on his way hither. No sooner had he risen from the grave than, practically, our Lord was coming back. Strange paradox! but his ascension into heaven was, in a certain sense, part of his coming back to us; for the way for him, from the cross on earth to the crown of the whole earth, was *viâ* the New Jerusalem. He is coming now as fast as wisdom judges it to be right. I am sure our Saviour will not delay a moment beyond what is absolutely needful, for he loves the church which is his bride, and as her Bridegroom he will not delay the long-expected hour of their meeting, never to part again. *He* is ready, it is the bride that needs to make

herself ready. Jesus desires to come; his heart is responsive to our cry when we say, "Come quickly!" He will come sooner than we think. We are bound to feel that he is at this moment on the road; and we are to live as if he might arrive at any moment.

We must trade on till our Lord has come. There must be no retiring from his business, even if we retire from our own; there must be no ceasing because we fancy we have done enough. Our rest will be when he comes, but till then we must trade on.

Let us labour as in his actual presence. How would you act with Jesus at your elbow? Act just so. He sees us as clearly as if his bodily presence were in our midst. Be aroused and inspired by the Redeemer's eye. Thus will you live in this trial state after the best possible manner.

IV. Now comes the sweet part of the subject. Note well THE SECRET DESIGN OF THE LORD. Did it ever strike you that this nobleman had a very kindly design towards his servants? Did this nobleman give these men one pound each with the sole design that they should make money for him? It would be absurd to think so. A few pounds would be no item to one who was made a king. No, no! It was as Mr. Bruce says, "he was not money-making, but character-making." His design was not to gain by them, but to educate them.

First, their being entrusted with a pound each was *a test.* This nobleman said to himself, "When I am a king I must have faithful servants in power around me. My going away gives me an opportunity of seeing what my servants are made of. I shall thus test their capacity and their industry, their honesty and their zeal. If they prove faithful over a few things they will be fit to be trusted with greater matters." The test was only a pound; and they could not make much mischief out of that, but it would be quite sufficient to try their capacity and fidelity, for he that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in much. They did not all endure the test, but by its means he revealed their characters.

It was also a *preparation* of them for future service. He would lift them up from being servants to become rulers. They were, therefore, to be put in a place of measurable responsibility, and to be made men of thereby. They were to be rulers over a very little—say a pound, and that which came of it, and this would be an education for them. In the process of trading they would be in training to rule. The best way to learn to be a master is to be first a servant, and the reason why some masters are hard and tyrannical is because they do not know the heart of a servant by experience. They know nothing of service, and so they have not the wisdom, and the generosity, and the tenderness, which masters should show towards servants. So this nobleman was wise, he was at the same time testing and training his men.

Besides this, I think he was giving them a little *anticipation* of their future honours. He was about to make them rulers over cities, and so he first made them rulers over pounds. They had been servants, and taken orders from him every morning; but now they have no master to go to, and must use their own discretion. They were in effect, in a small sphere, made into little kings. In all that country the citizens had rebelled, but there was a little kingdom of the nobleman's own

servants, and these obeyed him, and did their best to maintain his interest in their little way. They were already made free, placed in a measure of authority, and made to know the sweets and the burdens of personal responsibility. Oh, you that work for God, when you are overseers of others for him, when you win souls for him, and when you conquer adversaries in his name you are already anticipating your eternal reward. We are fashioning our future position upon the anvil of our lives; for heaven, though it be a state and a place prepared for us by the Lord Jesus, lies also mainly in character. The man is more the source of joy than the streets of gold in which he will walk. If you hide your pound and neglect your Master's service here you are making for yourselves a dim and hazy future in that grand millennial reign of his. You that addict yourselves to your holy trade, and consecrate yourselves entirely to your Lord, shall have large honours when he comes to reign among his ancients gloriously.

For see, when he came to the man who had earned ten pounds, he gave him ten cities. Think of that! There is no proportion between the poor service and the rich reward. A pound is rewarded with a city. The rewards of the millennium will evidently be all of grace, because they are so incomparably beyond anything which the servants' earnings could have deserved. Their Lord was not bound to pay them anything: they were his bond-servants; but what he gave them was of his overflowing grace. I do not think that he who brought five pounds was in the least blamed. He may have been just as diligent as the other, but he had less capacity. But how he must have opened his eyes when his master gave him five *cities*. Perhaps he wondered more than the first. Fancy if any one of us had been put to trade with a pound upon commission, and had received five cities for reward. The money earned would not buy the smallest house, and yet it brings in to the worker five cities! What surprise filled the heart of the recipient of such bounty! It never entered into his heart to envy the brother who had ten cities, for the five were so vast a recompense. He must have been carried away with rapture with the prospect before him. Though there may be degrees of glory, the only difference will be in the capacity of the blessed to contain it. All the vessels will be full, but they will not be all equally large: the man of the ten pounds will simply be a larger vessel, full to the brim; and the man with the five will be less capacious, but quite as full, to his own glad amazement and joyful bewilderment. However, let us go in for winning the ten pounds if we can. For our Lord's sake let us trade in spiritual things with all our hearts.

"But," saith one, "where and what will these cities be?" It may be that all this will literally happen during the millennial period, but I do not know. When Christ shall come the dead in Christ will rise first; and we read that "the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished." There may be space during that era for all the special rewards of the gospel dispensation. It may also be, but I do not know, and so I cannot tell you, that we are in future dispensations to fill unto other worlds much the same office as angels fill to ours. Jesus hath made us kings and priests, and we are in training for our thrones. What if in this congregation I am learning to proclaim my Master's glory to myriads of worlds! Possibly the preacher who is faithful here may yet be

made to tell forth his Lord's glory to constellations at a time. What if one might stand upon a central star and preach Christ to worlds on worlds instead of preaching him to these two galleries and to this area! Why not? At any rate, if I should ever gain a voice loud enough to be heard for millions of miles, I would speak none other than those glorious truths which the Lord has revealed in Christ Jesus. If we are faithful here, we may expect our Master to entrust us with higher service hereafter; only let us see to it that we are able to endure the test, and that we profit by the training. As our account comes out in the very little, so will it be with us on the grand scale of eternity. This puts another face upon the work of this lower sphere. Rulers over ten cities! Rulers over five cities! Brothers, you are not fit for such dignities if you cannot serve your Lord well in this world with the little he has entrusted to you. If you live wholly to him here, you will be prepared for the glories unspeakable which await all consecrated souls. Let us go in for a devoted life at once! Time is so short, and the things we deal with are comparatively so small! We are soon coming out of the eggshell of time; and when we break loose into eternity, and see the vastness of the divine purposes, we shall be altogether amazed at the service bestowed, which will be the reward of service done. O Lord, make us faithful! Amen.

Our Own Dear Shepherd

"I am the good Shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep"—John x. 14, 15.

As the passage stands in the Authorized Version, it reads like a number of short sentences with scarcely any apparent connection. Even in that form it is precious; for our Lord's pearls are priceless even when they are not threaded together. But when I tell you that in the Greek the word "and" is several times repeated, and that the translators have had to leave out one of these "ands" to make sense of the passage on their line of translation, you will judge that they are none too accurate in this case. To use many "ands" is after the manner of John; but there is usually a true and natural connection between his sentences. The "and" with him is usually a real golden link, and not a mere sound; we need a translation which makes it so. Observe also that in our Version the word "sheep" is put in italics, to show that it is not in the original. There is no need for this alteration if the passage is more closely rendered. Hear, then, the text in its natural form—

"*I am the good Shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*"

This reading I have given you is that of the Revised Version. For that Revised Version I have but little care as a general rule, holding it to be by no means an improvement upon our common Authorized Version. It is a useful thing to have it for private reference, but I trust it will never be regarded as the standard English translation of the New Testament. The Revised Version of the Old Testament is so excellent, that I am half afraid it may carry the Revised New Testament upon its shoulders into general use. I sincerely hope that this may not be the case, for the result would be a decided loss. However, that is not my point. Returning to our subject, I believe that, on this

occasion, the Revised Version is true to the original. We will therefore follow it in this instance, and we shall find that it makes most delightful and instructive sense. "I am the good Shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

He who speaks to us in these words is the Lord Jesus Christ. To our mind every word of Holy Scripture is precious. When God speaks to us by priest or prophet, or in any way, we are glad to hear. Though when, in the Old Testament, we meet with a passage which begins with "Thus saith the Lord" we feel specially charmed to have the message directly from God's own mouth, yet we make no distinction between this Scripture and that. We accept it all as inspired; and we are not given to dispute about different degrees and varying modes of inspiration, and all that. The matter is plain enough if learned unbelievers did not mystify it; "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. iii. 16). Still, there is to our mind a peculiar sweetness about words which were actually spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ himself: these are as honey in the comb. You have before you, in this text, not that which comes to you by prophet, priest, or king, but that which is spoken to you by one who is Prophet, Priest, and King in one, even your Lord Jesus Christ. He opens his mouth, and speaks to you. You will open your ear, and listen to him, if you be indeed his own.

Observe here, also, that we have not only Christ for the speaker, but we have Christ for the subject. He speaks, and speaks about himself. It were not seemly for you, or for me, to extol ourselves; but there is nothing more comely in the world than for Christ to commend himself. He is other than we are, something infinitely above us, and is not under rules which apply to us fallible mortals. When he speaketh forth his own glory, we feel that his speech is not vain-glory; nay, rather, when he praises himself, we thank him for so doing, and admire the lowly condescension which permits him to desire and accept honour from such poor hearts as ours. It were pride for us to seek honour of men; it is humility in him to do so, seeing he is so great an One that the esteem of beings so inferior as we are cannot be desired by him for his own sake, but for ours. Of all our Lord's words, those are the sweetest in which he speaks about himself. Even he cannot find another theme which can excel that of himself.

My brethren, who can speak of Jesus but himself? He masters all our eloquence. His perfection exceeds our understanding; the light of his excellence is too bright for us, it blinds our eyes. Our Beloved must be his own mirror. None but Jesus can reveal Jesus. Only he can see himself, and know himself, and understand himself; and therefore none but he can reveal himself. We are most glad that in his tenderness to us he sets himself forth by many choice metaphors, and instructive emblems, by which he would make us know some little of that love which passeth knowledge. With his own hand he fills a golden cup out of the river of his own infinity, and hands it to us that we may drink and be refreshed. Take, then, these words as being doubly refreshing, because they come directly from the Well-beloved's

own mouth, and contain rich revelations of his own all-glorious self. I feel that I must read them again;—"I am the good Shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

In this text there are three matters about which I shall speak. First, I see here *complete character*. "I am the good Shepherd." He is not a half shepherd, but a shepherd in the fullest possible sense. Secondly, I see *complete knowledge*, "and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father." Thirdly, here is *complete sacrifice*. How preciously that sentence winds up the whole, "and I lay down my life for the sheep"! He goes the full length to which sacrifice can go. He lays down his soul in the stead of his sheep; so the words might be not incorrectly translated. He goes the full length of self-sacrifice for his own.

I. First, then, here is COMPLETE CHARACTER. Whenever the Saviour describes himself by any emblem, that emblem is exalted, and expanded; and yet it is not able to bear all his meaning. The Lord Jesus fills out every type, figure, and character; and when the vessel is filled there is an overflow. There is more in Jesus, the good Shepherd, than you can pack away in a shepherd. He is the good, the great, the chief Shepherd; but he is much more. Emblems to set him forth may be multiplied as the drops of the morning, but the whole multitude will fail to reflect all his brightness. Creation is too small a frame in which to hang his likeness. Human thought is too contracted, human speech too feeble, to set him forth to the full. When all the emblems in earth and heaven shall have described him to their utmost, there will remain a somewhat not yet described. You may square the circle ere you can set forth Christ in the language of mortal men. He is inconceivably above our conceptions, unutterably above our utterances.

But notice that he here sets himself forth as a shepherd. Dwell on this for a moment. A shepherd is hardly such a man as we employ in England to look after sheep for a few months, till they are large enough to be slaughtered; a shepherd after the Oriental sort, such as Abraham, Jacob, or David, is quite another person.

The Eastern shepherd is generally *the owner* of the flock, or at least the son of their owner, and so their proprietor in prospect. The sheep are his own. English shepherds seldom, or never, own the sheep: they are employed to take care of them, and they have no other interest in them. Our native shepherds are a very excellent set of men as a rule —those I have known have been admirable specimens of intelligent working-men—yet they are not at all like the Oriental shepherd, and cannot be; for he is usually the owner of the flock which he tends. He remembers how he came into possession of the flock, and when and where each of the present sheep was born, and where he has led them, and what trials he had in connection with them; and he remembers this with the emphasis that they are his own inheritance.

His wealth consists in them. He very seldom has much of a house, and he does not usually own much land. He takes his sheep over a good stretch of country, which is open common for all his tribe; but his possessions lie in his flocks. Ask him, "How much are you worth?"

He answers, "I own so many sheep." In the Latin tongue the word for money is akin to the word "sheep," because, to many of the first Romans, wool was their wealth, and their fortunes lay in their flocks. The Lord Jesus is our Shepherd: we are his wealth. If you ask what is his heritage, he tells you of "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." Ask him what are his jewels, and he replies, "*They* shall be mine in that day." If you ask him where his treasures are, he will tell you, "The Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." The Lord Jesus Christ has nothing that he values as he does his own people. For their sakes he gave up all that he had, and died naked on the cross. Not only can he say, "I gave Ethiopia and Seba for thee," but he "loved his church, and gave himself for it." He regards his church as being his own body, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

The shepherd, as he owns the flock, is also *the caretaker*. He takes care of them always. One of our brethren now present is a fireman; and, as he lives at the fire-station, he is always on duty. I asked him whether he was not off duty during certain hours of every day; but he said, "No; I am never off duty." He is on duty when he goes to bed, he is on duty while he is eating his breakfast, he is on duty if he walks down the street. Any time the bell may ring the alarm, and he must be in his place, and hasten to the fire. Our Lord Jesus Christ is never off duty. He has constant care of his people day and night. He has declared it,—"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest." He can truly say what Jacob did. "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night." He says of his flock what he says of his garden, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." I cannot tell you all the care a shepherd has over his flock, because his anxieties are of such a various kind. Sheep have about as many complaints as men. You do not know much about them, and I am not going to enter into details, for the all-sufficient reason that I do not know much about them myself; but the shepherd knows, and the shepherd will tell you that he leads an anxious life. He seldom has all the flock well at one time. Some one or other is sure to be ailing, and he spies it out, and has eye and hand and heart ready for its succour and relief. There are many varieties of complaints and needs, and all these are laid upon the shepherd's heart. He is both possessor and caretaker of the flock.

Then he has to be *the provider* too, for there is not a woolly head among them that knows anything about the finding and selecting of pasturage. The season may be very dry, and where there once was grass there may be nothing but a brown powder. It may be that herbage is only to be found by the side of the rippling brooks, here and there a bit; but the sheep do not know anything about *that;* the shepherd must know everything for them. The shepherd is the sheep's providence. Both for time and for eternity, for body and for soul, our Lord Jesus supplies all our need out of his riches in glory. He is the great storehouse from which we derive everything. He has provided, he does provide, and he will provide; and each one of us may therefore sing, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

But, dear friends, we often dream that we are the shepherds, or that we, at any rate, have to find some of the pasture. I could not help saying just now to our friends at our little prayer-meeting, "There is a passage in the Psalms which makes the Lord do for us what one would have thought we could have done for ourselves—'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.'" Surely, if a sheep can do nothing else it can lie down. Yet to lie down is the very hardest thing for God's sheep to do. It is here that the full power of the rest-giving Christ has to come in to make our fretful, worrying, doubtful natures lie down and rest. Our Lord is able to give us perfect peace, and he will do so if we will simply trust to his abounding care. It is the shepherd's business to be the provider; let us remember this, and be very happy.

Moreover, he has to be *the leader*. He leads the sheep wherever they have to go. I have often been astonished at the shepherds in the South of France, which is so much like Palestine, to see where they will take their sheep. Once every week I saw the shepherd come down to Mentone, and conduct all his flock to the sea-beach. I could see nothing for them but big stones. Folk say that perhaps this is what makes the mutton so hard; but I have no doubt the poor creatures get a little taste of salt, or something which does them good. At any rate, they follow the shepherd, and away he goes up the steep hillsides, taking long steps, till he reaches points where the grass is growing on the sides of the hills. He knows the way, and the sheep have nothing to do but to follow him wherever he goes. Theirs not to make the way; theirs not to choose the path; but theirs to keep close to his heel.

Do you not see our blessed Shepherd leading your own pilgrimage? Cannot you see him guiding your way? Do you not say, "Yes, he leadeth me, and it is my joy to follow"? Lead on, O blessed Lord; lead on, and we will follow the traces of thy feet!

The shepherd in the East has also to be *the defender* of the flock, for wolves yet prowl in those regions. All sorts of wild beasts attack the flock, and he must be to the front. Thus is it with our Shepherd. No wolf can attack us without finding our Lord in arms against him. No lion can roar upon the flock without arousing a greater than David. "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

He is a shepherd, then, and he completely fills the character—much more completely than I can show you just now.

Notice that the text puts an adjective upon the shepherd, decorating him with a chain of gold. The Lord Jesus Christ himself says, "I am the *good* Shepherd." "The *good* Shepherd"—that is, he is not a thief that steals, and only deals with the sheep as he bears them from the fold to the slaughter. He is not a hireling: he does not do merely what he is paid to do, or commanded to do, but he does everything *con amore*, with a willing heart. He throws his soul into it. There is a goodness, a tenderness, a willingness, a powerfulness, a force, an energy in all that Jesus does that makes him to be the best possible Shepherd that can be. He is no hireling; neither is he an idler. Even shepherds that have had their own flocks have neglected them, as there are farmers who do not well cultivate their own farms; but it is never so with Christ. He is the good Shepherd: good up to the highest point of goodness, good in all that is tender, good in all that is kind, good in all the directions in

which a shepherd can be needed; good at fight, and good at rule; good in watchful oversight, and good in prudent leadership; good every way most eminently.

And then notice he puts it, "I am *the* good Shepherd." That is the point I want to bring out. Of other shepherds we can say, he is *a* shepherd; but this is *the* Shepherd. All others in the world are shadows of the true Shepherd; and Jesus is the substance of them all. That which we see in the world with these eyes is after all not the substance, but the type, the shadow. That which we do not see with our eyes, that which only our faith perceives, is after all the real thing. I have seen shepherds; but they were only pictures to me. *The* Shepherd, the real, the truest, the best, the most sure example of shepherdry is the Christ himself; and you and I are the sheep. Those sheep we see on yonder mountain-side are just types of ourselves: but we are the true sheep, and Jesus is the true Shepherd. If an angel were to fly over the earth to find out the real sheep, and the real Shepherd, he would say, "The sheep of God's pasture are men; and Jehovah is their Shepherd. He is the true, the real Shepherd of the true and real sheep." All the possibilities that lie in a shepherd are found in Christ. Every good thing that you can imagine to be, or that should be, in a shepherd, you find in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I want you to notice that, according to the text, the Lord Jesus Christ greatly rejoices in this. He says, "I am the good Shepherd." He does not confess that fact as if he were ashamed of it, but he repeats it in this chapter so many times that it almost reads like the refrain of a song. "I am the good Shepherd": he evidently rejoices in it. He rolls it under his tongue as a sweet morsel. Evidently it is to his heart's content. He does not say, "I am the Son of God, I am the Son of man, I am the Redeemer"; but this he does say, and he congratulates himself upon it: "I am the good Shepherd."

This should encourage you and me to get a full hold of the word. If Jesus is so pleased to be my Shepherd, let me be equally pleased to be his sheep; and let me avail myself of all the privileges that are wrapped up in his being my Shepherd, and in my being his sheep. I see that it will not worry him for me to be his sheep. I see that my needs will cause him no perplexity. I see that he will not be going out of his way to attend to my weakness and trouble. He delights to dwell on the fact, "I am the good Shepherd." He invites me, as it were, to come and bring my wants and woes to him, and then look up to him, and be fed by him. Therefore I will do it.

Does it not make you feel truly happy to hear your own Lord say himself, and say it to you out of this precious Book, "I am the good Shepherd"? Do you not reply, "Indeed thou art a good Shepherd. Thou art a good Shepherd to me. My heart lays emphasis upon the word 'good,' and says of thee, 'there is none good but One, but thou art that good One.' Thou art the good Shepherd of the sheep"?

So much, then, concerning the complete character.

II. May the Holy Spirit bless the word still more, while I speak in my broken way upon the next point: THE COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE.

The knowledge of Christ towards his sheep, and of the sheep towards him, is wonderfully complete. I must read the text again—"I know

mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father."

First, then, consider *Christ's knowledge of his own, and the comparison by which he sets it forth:* "As the Father knows me." I cannot conceive a stronger comparison. Dost thou know how much the Father knows the Son, who is his glory, his darling, his *alter ego*, his other self—yea, one God with him? Dost thou know how intimate the knowledge of the Father must be of his Son, who is his own wisdom, ay, who is his own self? The Father and the Son are one spirit. We cannot tell how intimate is that knowledge; and yet so intimately, so perfectly, does the great Shepherd know his sheep.

He knows their *number*. He will never lose one. He will count them all again in that day when the sheep shall pass again under the hand of him that telleth them, and then he will make full tale of them. "Of all that thou hast given me," says he, "I have lost none." He knows the number of those for whom he paid the ransom-price.

He knows their *persons*. He knows the age and character of every one of his own. He assures us that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Christ has not an unknown sheep. It is not possible that he should have overlooked or forgotten one of them. He has such an intimate knowledge of all who are redeemed with his most precious blood that he never mistakes one of them for another, nor misjudges one of them. He knows their constitutions,—those that are weak and feeble, those that are nervous and frightened, those that are strong, those that have a tendency to presumption, those that are sleepy, those that are brave, those that are sick, sorry, worried, or wounded. He knows those that are hunted by the devil, those that are caught up between the jaws of the lion, and shaken till the very life is almost driven out of them. He knows their feelings, fears, and frights. He knows the secret ins and outs of every one of us better than any one of us knows himself.

He knows our *trials*,—the particular trial under which you are now bowed down, my sister; our difficulties,—that special difficulty which seems to block up your way, my brother, at this very time. All the ingredients of our life-cup are known to him. "I know mine own, as the Father knoweth me." It is impossible to conceive a completer knowledge than that which the Father has of his only-begotten Son; and it is equally impossible to conceive a completer knowledge than that which Jesus Christ has of every one of his chosen.

He knows our *sins*. I often feel glad to think that he always did know our evil natures, and what would come of them. When he chose us, he knew what we were, and what we should be. He did not buy his sheep in the dark. He did not choose us without knowing all the devious ways of our past and future lives.

> "He saw us ruined in the fall,
> Yet loved us notwithstanding all."

Herein lieth the splendour of his grace. "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." His election implies foreknowledge of all our ill manners. They say of human love that it is blind; but Christ's love has many eyes, and all its eyes are open, and yet he loves us still.

I need not enlarge upon this. It ought, however, to be very full of

comfort to you that you are so known of your Lord, especially as he knows you not merely with the cold, clear knowledge of the intellect, but with the knowledge of love and of affection. He knows you in his heart. You are peculiarly dear to him. You are approved of him. You are accepted of him. He knows you by acquaintance with you; not by hearsay. He knows you by communion with you; he has been with you in sweet fellowship. He has read you as a man reads his book, and remembers what he reads. He knows you by sympathy with you: he is a man like yourself.

> "He knows what sore temptations mean,
> For he has felt the same."

He knows your weaknesses. He knows the points wherein you suffer most, for

> "In every pang that rends the heart
> The Man of sorrows had a part."

He gained this knowledge in the school of sympathetic suffering. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." "He was in all points made like unto his brethren;" and by being made like to us he has come to know us, and he does know us in a very practical and tender way. You have a watch, and it will not go, or it goes very irregularly, and you give it into the hands of one who knows nothing about watches; and he says, "I will clean it for you." He will do it more harm than good. But here is the very person who made the watch. He says, "I put every wheel into its place; I made the whole of it, from beginning to end." You think to yourself, "I feel the utmost confidence in trusting that man with my watch; he can surely put it right, for he made it." It often cheers my heart to think that since the Lord made me he can put me right, and keep me so to the end. My Maker is my Redeemer. He that first made me has made me again, and will make me perfect, to his own praise and glory. That is the first part of this complete knowledge.

The second part of the subject is *our knowledge of the Lord, and the fact by which it is illustrated.* "And mine own know me, even as I know the Father." I think I hear some of you say, "I do not see so much in that. I can see a great deal more in Christ's knowing us." Beloved, I see a great deal in our knowing Christ. That he should know me is great condescension, but it must be easy to him to know me. Being so divine, with such a piercing eye as his, it is amazingly condescending, as I say, but it is not difficult for him to know me. The marvel is that I should ever know him. That such a stupid, blind, deaf, dead soul as mine should ever know him, and should know him as he knows the Father, is ten thousand miracles in one. Oh, sirs, this is a wonder so great that I do not think you and I have come at it yet to the full, or else we should sit down in glad surprise, and say,—This proves him to be the good Shepherd indeed, not only that he knows his flock, but that he has taught them so well that they know him! With such a flock as Christ has, that he should be able to train his sheep so that they should be able to know him, and to know him as he knows the Father, is miraculous.

O beloved, if this be true of us, that we know our Shepherd, we

may clap our hands for very joy! And yet I think it is true even now. At any rate, I know so much of my Lord that nothing gives me so much joy as to hear of him. Brethren, there is no boasting in this personal assertion of mine. It is only the bare truth. You can say the same; can you not? If anybody were to preach to you the finest sermon that was ever delivered, would it charm you if there was no Christ in it? No. But you will come and hear me talk about Jesus Christ in words as simple as ever I can find, and you cry one to another, "It was good to be there."

"Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb,
We love to hear of thee:
No music's like thy charming name,
Nor half so sweet can be."

Now mark that this is the way in which Jesus knows the Father. Jesus delights in his Father, and you delight in Jesus. I know you do; and herein the comparison holds good.

Moreover, does not the dear name of Jesus stir your very soul? What is it that makes you feel as if you wish to hasten away, that you might be doing holy service for the Lord? What makes your very heart awake, and feel ready to leap out of your body? What but hearing of the glories of Jesus? Play on what string you please, and my ear is deaf to it; but when you once begin to tell of Calvary, and sing the song of free grace, and dying love, oh, then my soul opens all her ears, and drinks in the music, and then her blood begins to stir, and she is ready to shout for joy! Do you not even now sing—

"Oh, for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break,
And all harmonious human tongues
The Saviour's praises speak.

"Yes, we will praise thee, dearest Lord,
Our souls are all on flame,
Hosanna round the spacious earth
To thine adorèd name?"

Yes, we know Jesus. We feel the power of our union with him. We know him, brethren, so that we are not to be deceived by false shepherds. There is a way nowadays of preaching Christ against Christ. It is a new device of the devil to set up Jesus against Jesus, his kingdom against his atonement, his precepts against his doctrines. The half Christ in his example is put up, to frighten souls away from the whole Christ, who saves the souls of men from guilt as well as from sin, from hell as well as from folly. But they cannot deceive us in that way. No, beloved, we know our Shepherd from all others. We know him from a statue covered with his clothes. We know the living Christ, for we have come into living contact with him, and we cannot be deceived any more than Jesus Christ himself can be deceived about the Father. "Mine own know me, even as I know the Father." We know him by union with him, and by communion with him. "We have seen the Lord." "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

We know him by love: our soul cleaves to him, even as the heart of Christ cleaves to the Father. We know him by trusting him—"He is all my salvation, and all my desire." I remember once feeling many questions as to whether I was a child of God or not. I went into a little chapel, and I heard a good man preach. He was a simple working-man. I heard him preach, and I made my handkerchief sodden with my tears as I heard him talk about Christ, and the precious blood. When I was preaching the same things to others I was wondering whether this truth was mine, but while I was hearing for myself I knew it was mine, for my very soul lived upon it. I went to that good man, and thanked him for the sermon. He asked me who I was. When I told him, he turned all manner of colours. "Why," he said, "Sir, that was your own sermon." I said, "Yes, I knew it was, and it was good of the Lord to feed me with food that I had prepared for others." I perceived that I had a true taste for what I myself knew to be the gospel of Jesus Christ. Oh, yes, we do love our good Shepherd! We cannot help it.

And we know him also by a deep sympathy with him; for what Christ desires to do, we also long to do. He loves to save souls, and so do we. Would we not save all the people in a whole street if we could? Ay, in a whole city, and in the whole world! Nothing makes us so glad as that Jesus Christ is a Saviour. "There is news in the paper," says one. That news is often of small importance to our hearts. I happened to hear that a poor servant girl had heard me preach the truth, and found Christ; and I confess I felt more interest in that fact than in all the rise and fall of Whigs or Tories. What does it matter who is in Parliament, so long as souls are saved? That is the main thing. If the kingdom of Christ grows, all the other kingdoms are of small account. That is the one kingdom for which we live, and for which we would gladly die. As there is a boundless sympathy between the Father and the Son, so is there between Jesus and ourselves.

We know Christ as he knows the Father, because we are one with him. The union between Christ and his people is as real and as mysterious as the union between the Son and the Father.

We have a beautiful picture before us. Can you realize it for a minute? The Lord Jesus here among us—picture him! He is the Shepherd. Then, around him are his own people, and wherever he goes they go. He leads them into green pastures, and beside the still waters. And there is this peculiarity about them: he knows them as he looks upon every one of them, and they every one of them know him. There is a deeply intimate and mutual knowledge between them. As surely as he knows them, they know him. The world knows neither the Shepherd nor the sheep, but they know each other. As surely as truly, and as deeply, as God the Father knows the Son, so does this Shepherd know his sheep; and as God the Son knows his Father, so do these sheep know their Shepherd. Thus in one band, united by mutual intercourse, they travel through the world to heaven. "I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father." Is not that a blessed picture? God help us to figure in it!

III. The last subject is COMPLETE SACRIFICE. The complete sacrifice is thus described,—"*I lay down my life for the sheep.*"

These words are repeated in this chapter in different forms some four times. The Saviour keeps on saying, "I lay down my life for the sheep." Read the eleventh verse: "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The fifteenth verse: "I lay down my life for the sheep." The seventeenth verse: "I lay down my life, that I may take it again." The eighteenth verse: "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." It looks as if this was another refrain of our Lord's personal hymn. I call this passage his pastoral song. The good Shepherd with his pipe sings to himself and to his flock, and this comes in at the end of each stanza, "I lay down my life for the sheep."

Did it not mean, first, that he was always doing so? All his life long he was, as it were, laying it down for them; he was divesting himself of the garments of life, till he came to be fully disrobed on the cross. All the life he had, all the power he had, he was always laying it out for his sheep. It means that, to begin with.

And then it means that the sacrifice was actively performed. It was ever in the doing as long as he lived; but he did it actively. He did not die for the sheep merely, but he laid down his life, which is another thing. Many a man has died for Christ: it was all that he could do. But we cannot lay down our lives, because they are due already as a debt of nature to God, and we are not permitted to die at our own wills. That were suicidal and improper. With the Lord Christ it was totally different. He was, as it were, actively passive. "I lay down my life for the sheep. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."

I like to think of our good Shepherd, not merely as dying for us, but as willingly dying—laying down his life: while he had that life, using it for us; and when the time came, putting off that life on our behalf. This has now been actually done. When he spoke these words, it had not been done. At this time it has been done. "I lay down my life for the sheep" may now be read, "I have laid down my life for the sheep." For you, beloved, he has given his hands to the nails, and his feet to the cruel iron. For you he has borne the fever and the bloody sweat; for you he has cried "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani;" for you he has given up the ghost.

And the beauty of it is that he is not ashamed to avow the object of it. "I lay down my life *for the sheep.*" Whatever Christ did for the world—and I am not one of those who would limit the bearings of the death of Christ upon the world—yet his peculiar glory is, "I lay down my life *for the sheep.*

Great Shepherd, do you mean to say that you have died for such as these? What! for these sheep? Died for them? What! die for sheep, Shepherd? Surely you have other objects for which to live beside sheep. Have you not other loves, other joys? We know that it would grieve you to see the sheep killed, torn by the wolf, or scattered; but you really have not gone so far in love for them that for the sake of those poor creatures you would lay down your life? "Ah, yes," he says, "I would, I have!" Carry your wondering thoughts to Christ Jesus. What! What! What! Son of God, infinitely great and inconceivably glorious Jehovah, wouldst thou lay thy life down for men and women? They are no more in comparison with thee than so many ants and wasps,

pitiful and obnoxious creatures. Thou couldst make ten thousand millions of them with a word, or crush them out of existence at one blow of thy hand. They are poor things, make the most you can of them. They have hard hearts, and wandering wills; and the best of them are no better than they should be. Saviour, didst thou die for such? He looks round, and says, "Yes, I did. I did. I laid down my life for the sheep. I am not ashamed of them, and I am not ashamed to say that I died for them." No, beloved, he is not ashamed of his dying love. He has told it to his brethren up yonder, and made it known to all the servants in his Father's house, and this has become the song of that house, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!" Shall not we take it up, and say, "For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood"? Whatever men may talk about particular redemption, Christ is not ashamed of it. He glories that he laid down his life for the sheep. *For the sheep,* mark you. He says not for the world. There is a bearing of the death of Christ towards the world; but here he boasts, and glories in the specialty of his sacrifice. "I lay down my life *for the sheep,*"—"instead of the sheep," it might be read. He glories in substitution for his people. He makes it his boast, when he speaks of his chosen, that he suffered in their stead—that he bore, that they might never bear, the wrath of God on account of sin. What he glories in, we also glory in. "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!"

O beloved, what a blessed Christ we have who loves us so, who knows us so—whom we also know and love! May others be taught to know him, and to love him! Yea, at this hour may they come and put their trust in him, as the sheep trust to the shepherd! We ask it for Jesu's sake. Amen.

Other Sheep and One Flock

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall be one fold, and one shepherd (or more correctly, one *flock*, one shepherd)"—John x. 16.

THIS verse is guarded before and behind by two notable statements. Before it we hear the Master say, "I lay down my life for the sheep," and immediately after it we meet with another grand sentence, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again." The first statement, "*I lay down my life for the sheep*" is the sheet anchor of our confidence when storms assail the vessel of the church. The Lord Jesus has by his death proved his love to his people; and his determination to save them is made clear by his laying down his life for them; therefore doubt and fear should be banished and the very name of despair should be unknown among the Israel of God. Now are we sure of the love of the Son of God to his chosen flock, for we have an infallible proof of it in the laying down of his life for them. Now also are we absolutely certain that Christ's purpose is perpetual: it cannot alter; the Lord Jesus has committed himself to that purpose beyond recall, for the price is paid and the deed is done by which the purpose is to be effected. Beyond this we are hereby assured beyond a shadow of a doubt that the divine purpose will be carried out, for it cannot be that Christ should die in vain. We think it a kind of blasphemy to suppose that his blood should be spilt for naught. Whatever was proposed to be accomplished by the laying down of the life of the Son of God, we feel absolutely certain that it will be fully performed in the teeth of all adversaries; for we are not now speaking of man's design, but of the purpose of God, to which he devoted the heart's blood of his only-begotten Son. We both patiently hope and quietly wait to see the salvation of God, and the performance of all his designs of love; for that death upon the cross is a cause which will surely produce its effect. Christ did not die at a peradventure. The supposition of a Saviour disappointed in the results of his blood-shedding is not to be tolerated for a moment. In darkest times that glorious cross flames with light. No evil event can prevent its efficacy. Still in that sign we conquer. If Jesus has laid down his life for the sheep, then all is well. Rest assured of the Father's

love to those sheep; rest assured of the immutability of the Divine purpose concerning them, and rest assured of its ultimate achievement. It must not, shall not be that God's own Son shall lay down his life in vain. Though heaven and earth should pass away, the precious heart's blood of the Son of God shall accomplish the end for which it was so freely poured forth. Jesus says, "I lay down my life for the sheep," therefore the sheep must live who have been redeemed at such a price as this, and the Shepherd in them shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. So far we are cheered by the vanguard which marches in advance of our text.

But as if the poor, timid people of God would, nevertheless, at times fancy that the purpose of Christ would not be achieved, behold in the rear another sentence, "*I lay down my life that I might take it again.*" He that died, and so redeemed his people by price, lives that he may himself personally see that they are also redeemed by power. If a man dies to achieve a purpose, you feel sure that his very soul must have been in it: but if that man should rise again from the dead, and still pursue his purpose you would see how resolutely he was set on his design. If he rose with greater power, clothed with higher rank, and elevated to a more eminent position, and if he still pursued his great object, you would then be more than certain of his never-ending determination to perform his design. In the risen life of Jesus assurance is made doubly sure: now are we sure that his design must be carried out, nothing can hinder it. We dare not dream that the Son of God can be disappointed of the object for which he died, and for which he lives again. If Jesus died for a purpose he will accomplish it; if Jesus rose for a purpose, he will accomplish it; if Jesus lives for ever for a purpose, he will accomplish it. To me this conclusion seems to be past question: and if it be so, it puts the destiny of the sheep beyond all hazard. Did not Paul argue much in the same way when he said, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life"?

If any of you have been cast down by reason of present difficulties, let these two grand texts sound their silver trumpets in your ears. If you have been looking forth from the windows, and the outlook has seemed to be exceeding dark, take courage, I pray you, from what your Lord has done: his death and resurrection are prophetic of good things to come. You dare not think that Christ will miss the end of his death: you dare not think that he will miss the purpose of his glory-life: why, then, are you cast down? His will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven, as surely as he came from heaven to earth, and has returned from earth to heaven. His purpose shall be carried out as surely as he died and lives again. Is not this the secret reason why, when the Lord appeared to his sorrowing servant John, he said to him, "I am he that liveth and was dead and am alive for evermore, amen, and have the keys of death and of hell"? Is not the dying and then living Shepherd the safety and the glory of the flock? Wherefore comfort one another with these words of your Lord, "I lay down my life for the sheep"; "I lay down my life, that I might take it again."

I. There are four things in the text itself which deserve your

attention, for they are full of consolation to minds troubled by the evils of these perilous times. The first is this,—OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HAD A PEOPLE UNDER THE WORST CIRCUMSTANCES. When he speaks of "other sheep," it is implied that he had certain sheep at the time; and when he says "other sheep have I which are not of this fold," it is manifest that even then the Good Shepherd had a fold. The times were grievously dark and evil, but a few true hearts clustered about the Saviour and by his divine power were protected as in a "fold." It has been supposed that our Lord here alludes to the Jews as "this fold"; but the Jews, as such, were never Christ's fold. He could not have meant to call the Jews around him his fold, for a little further on he exclaims, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." His fold were that little handful of disciples whom by his personal ministry he had gathered, and who stood folded, as it were, about their Good Shepherd. They might be sneered at as a little company, but he saith to his enemies who are standing outside the fold foaming with wrath, "Other sheep I have that are not of this little fold: these you cannot see, but I have them none the less for that; these I must in due time lead, and then there shall be one flock and one Shepherd."

See, then, that the Lord Jesus had a people in the worst times. Doubtless these days are exceedingly dangerous, and I have certain brethren round me who never allow me to forget it, for they play well in the minor key, and dwell most judiciously upon the necessary topic of the general declension of the church and the growing depravity of the world. I would not stop them from their faithful warnings, although I can assure them that, with slight variations, I have heard the same tune for years. Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up, and it has been good for me. I recollect hearing some thirty years ago that we lived in awful times; and, as nearly as I can recollect, the times have been awful ever since; and I suppose they always will be. The watchmen of the night see everything except the coming of the morning. Our pilots perceive dangers ahead and steer with caution. Perhaps this is as it should be; at any rate, it is better than sleeping in a fool's paradise. Be this as it may, it is clear that the days of our Lord Jesus Christ were emphatically terrible times. No age can be worse than that age which literally crucified the Son of God, crying, "Away with him! Away with him!" Whether the present days are better than those I will not determine, but they cannot be worse. The day of our Lord's first advent was the culmination and the crisis of the world's career of sin; and yet the Good Shepherd had a fold among men in the midnight of history.

There was *a sad lack of vital godliness* in those days. A few godly ones watched for the coming of the Messiah; but they were very few, such as good old Simeon and Anna. A small remnant sighed and cried for the abounding sin of the nation; but the salt was almost gone: Israel was becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. The choice band of mourners in Zion had not quite died out, but their number was so few that a child might write them. Speaking generally, when the Saviour came to his own, his own received him not. The mass of professing people in that day was rotten throughout; the life of God was gone; it

could not dwell with the Pharisees nor the Sadducees, nor any of the sects of the times, for they were altogether gone out of the way. The Lord looked, and there was no man to help or to uphold his righteous cause: those who professed to be its champions had altogether become unprofitable. As for the religious teachers, their mouth was become an open sepulchre, and the poison of asps was under their tongues: and yet the Lord had a people in Judea even then. On earth there was still a fold for sheep whom he had chosen who knew the Shepherd's voice and gathered to his call and followed him faithfully.

It was a time when *will-worship abounded.* Men had given up worshipping God according to the Scriptures, and they worshipped according to their own fancies. Then you might hear the trumpet in every corner of the street, for Pharisees were distributing their alms. You could see fathers and mothers neglected, and families broken up because the scribes had taught the people that if they should say "Corban" they were free from all obligation to help father or mother. They taught for doctrines the commandments of men, and the commandments of God were laid on one side. To wear broad-bordered garments and phylacteries was exalted into a matter of first importance; while to lie and cheat were mere trifles. To eat with unwashen hands was thought to be a crime, but to devour widow's houses was a thing which to the most self-righteous Pharisee caused no qualm of conscience. The land was filled with will-worship, and that is one great and growing hindrance nowadays; but for all that Christ had a fold of his own, and in it were those who knew his voice, and these, following at his heel, were enabled to go in and out and find pasture.

It was a day when there was the most *fierce opposition* to the real truth of God. Our Lord Jesus could hardly open his mouth but they took up stones to stone him. It was said that he had a devil and was mad; and that he was a "gluttonous man and a wine bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners." The rage of men against Christ was then boiling at its greatest heat, till at last they took him and nailed him to the cross because they could not endure that he should live among them. And yet he had his own in those dreadful times: even then he had his chosen company for whom he laid down his life, of whom he said to the Father, "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word." To those he spake saying "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." Wherefore, beloved, I gather that though at this time there is a sad decline in vital godliness, and though will worship sweeps over the land with its tumultuous waves, and though opposition to the pure truth of Christ is more fierce than ever; nevertheless even at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Even to-day the answer of God saith to the complaining prophet, "Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal." Wherefore, my brethren, in confidence possess ye your souls.

Now, it is to be noticed that this little company of Christ's people he calls a "fold." Afterwards they were to be a "flock," but while his bodily presence was with them they were pre-eminently a "fold." They were few in number, all of one race, mostly in one place, and so

compact that they could fitly be said to be a fold. One glance of the Shepherd's bodily eye saw them all. Happily, also, they were so thoroughly distinct from the rest of the world that they were eminently and evidently folded. Our Lord said of them, "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." He had shut them in to himself, and shut the world out. Within this blessed seclusion they were perfectly safe, so that their Lord said to the Father, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." Whatever their mistakes and faults, and they were many, yet they did not conform themselves to the generation among which they dwelt, but they were kept apart as in a fold while Jesus was with them. In that fold they were protected from all ill weathers, and from the wolf, and the thief. The Lord's presence with them was like a wall of fire round about them: they had only to run to him and he answered all their adversaries, and defended them from reproach. Like another David, the Lord Jesus guarded his flock from all the ravening lions that sought to devour them. True, even in that little fold there were goats, for he himself said, "I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." Even then they were not absolutely pure, but they were wonderfully so; and they were marvellously separated from the world, preserved from false doctrine, and kept from dividing and scattering. Within that fold they were being strengthened for the future following of their great Shepherd. They were learning a thousand things which would be useful to them when afterwards he sent them forth as lambs among wolves; so that they would be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," because of what they had learned of their Lord. Thus you see that in the worst times the Lord had a church, I might almost say the best church. May I not call it so? for that apostolic church upon which the Holy Ghost descended was not a whit behind the church of any era that succeeded it. It was the choice flock of all the flocks of the ages, even that feeble company of which Jesus said, "Fear not, little little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Yet you see one thing is notable here, that when Jesus had thus shut them all in he would not allow them to become exclusive and glide into a state of selfish satisfaction. No, he opens wide the door of the sheepfold and cries to them, "Other sheep I have." Thus he checks a tendency so common in the church to be forgetful of those outside the fold, and to make one's own personal salvation the sum and substance of religion. I do not think it wrong to sing—

> "We are a garden wall'd around,
> Chosen, and made peculiar ground;
> A little spot, enclosed by grace
> Out of the world's wide wilderness."

On the contrary, I judge that the verse is true, and sweet, and ought to be sung; but then there are other truths besides this one. To us also the Shepherd opens the door of the enclosed garden and says, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." The fold is our abode, but it is

not our sole sphere of action; for we are to go forth of it into all the world seeking our brethren. Seeing that our Lord has other sheep which are not of this fold, and these are to be found by him through his faithful people, let us arouse ourselves to the holy enterprise.

> "O, come, let us go and find them
> In the paths of death they roam;
> At the close of the day 'twill be sweet to say,
> 'I have brought some lost one home.'"

Beloved, I shall leave this point when I have said to you,—never despair! The Lord of hosts is with his people. They may be few and poor, but they are Christ's, and that makes them precious. A common sheepfold is not a thing of glory and beauty, four rough walls compose it, and it is but a hovel for sheep; even so the church may appear mean and base in men's eyes; but then it is the sheepfold of the Shepherd-King, and the sheep belong to the Lord God Almighty. There is a glory about this which angels do not fail to see. Here is human weakness, but also divine power. We do not, I fear, estimate the strength of a church aright. I read of three brethren who had to carry on a college when funds were running short. One of them complained that they had no helpers, and could not hope to succeed; but another who had more faith said to his brother, "Do you ask what we can do? Do you say that we are so few? I do not see that we are few; for we are a thousand at the least." "A thousand of us!" said the other, "how is that?" "Why," replied the first, "I am a cipher, and you are a cipher, and our brother is a cipher; so we have three noughts to begin with. Then I am sure the Lord Jesus is ONE: put him down before the three ciphers and we have a thousand directly." Was not this bravely spoken? What power we have when we do but set the great ONE in the front. You are nothing, brother; you are nothing, sister; I am nothing; we are all nothing when we are put together without our Lord: but, oh, if he stands in front of us then we are thousands; and again is it true on earth as in heaven, the chariots of the Lord are twenty thousand, even thousands of messengers, the Lord is among them as in the holy place. Wherefore, my friends, be ye not cast down at any time, but say unto yourselves—We are not even now come to so dark a night as once fell on this world. We are not at this painful moment in such a desperate condition as the church of Christ was in his own day; and if the Lord be spiritually in the midst of us we need not fear though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, for there is a city which abides for ever, and there is a river the streams whereof shall for ever make her glad. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early. Wherefore, my fellow-believers, be ye strong and of good courage!

II. But now, secondly, it is clear, for the text teaches it in so many words, that OUR LORD HATH OTHER SHEEP NOT YET KNOWN TO US. He says, "Other sheep I have." I want you to notice that strong expression, "Other sheep *I have*,"—not "I shall have," but "I have other sheep." Many of these sheep were not even in the thoughts of the apostles. I do not think it had crossed the mind of Peter, James, or John that their Lord had any sheep in this poor savage island, then scarcely regarded as being within the borders of the earth. I do not

suppose the apostles at that time even dreamed that their Lord Jesus had sheep in Rome. No, their most liberal notion was that the Hebrew nation might be converted, and the scattered of the seed of Abraham gathered together in one. Our Shepherd-King has greater thoughts than the most large-hearted of his servants. He delights to enlarge the area of our love. "Other sheep have I." You do not know them, but the Shepherd does. Unknown to ministers, unknown to the warmest-hearted Christians, there are many in the world whom Jesus claims for his own through the covenant of grace.

Who are these? Well, these "other sheep" were, first, *his chosen;* for he has a people whom he has chosen out of the world, and ordained unto eternal life. "Ye have not chosen me," said he, "but I have chosen you,"—there is a people upon whom his sovereignty has fixed its loving choice from before the foundation of the world. And of these elect ones he says, "I have them." His election of them is the basis of his property in them. These are also *those whom his Father gave him*, of whom he says in another place, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me": and again, "Of those whom thou hast given me I have lost none." His Father's eternal donation of them seals his title to them. These are the people for whom he peculiarly and especially laid down his life, that they might be *the redeemed of the Lord.* "Christ loved his church, and gave himself for it." These are they that are redeemed from among men, of whom we read, "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." The Lord Jesus laid down his life for his sheep: he tells us so himself, and none can question his own statement. These are those of whom Jesus says "I have them," for on account of these he entered into *suretiship engagements*, even as Jacob undertook the flock of Laban and watched day and night that he should not lose them, and if one had been torn, he would have had to make it good. These sheep represent a people for whom Christ hath entered into suretiship engagements with his Father that he will deliver each one of them safely at the last day of account, not one of them being absent when the sheep shall pass again under the hand of him that telleth them as they will at the last great day. "Other sheep I have," says Christ. How wonderful that he should say, "I have them," though as yet they were far off by wicked works.

What was their state? They were a people without shepherd, without fold, without pasture, lost on the mountains, wandering in the woods, lying down to die, ready to be devoured by the wolf; yet Jesus says, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold." They were sheep that had wandered exceeding far, even into the most shameful iniquity, and yet he says, "I have them." Bad as this world is to-day, it must have been far worse in the cruel Roman age as to open vices and unmentionable abominations; and yet these wanderers were the sheep of Christ, and in due time they were delivered from their sins, and fetched away from all the superstition and idolatry and filthiness into which they had wandered. They were Christ's even while they were afar off; he had chosen them, the Father had given them to him, he had bought them, and he determined to have them; nay, he saith, "I have them," and he calls them his own even while they are transgressing and running headlong to destruction.

It seems to me that these were as well known to Christ as those that were in his fold. I think I see him, the Divine Man, standing there confronting his adversaries, and when he has cast his glance upon his foes, I see his eyes going to and fro throughout the whole earth to gaze upon a sight far more pleasant to him. While he speaks his eyes flash with joyous fire as they light upon thousands out of every kindred and people and tongue, and while he quotes to himself the words of the twenty-second Psalm: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation." He spies out the myriads that are his, and he rejoices before his scornful foes as he sees his growing kingdom which they are powerless to overthrow. Proud, self-righteous men may blindly refuse the leadership of the Lord's anointed Shepherd, but he shall not be without a flock to be his honour and reward. Did not the Lord at that time rejoice in his inmost heart and soliloquize within himself thus—"Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength"? This led him to say, "Other sheep I have."

In this there is great comfort for God's people who love the souls of their fellow-men. The Lord has a people in London, and he knows them. "I have much people in this city," was said to the apostle when as yet nobody was converted there. "I have them," says Christ; though as yet they had not sought him. Our Lord Jesus has an elect redeemed people all over the world at this time, though as yet they are not called by grace. I know not where they are, nor where they are not; but for certain he has them somewhere, since still it stands true, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold." This is a part of our authority for going out to find the lost sheep; for we brethren have a right to go anywhere to ask after our Master's sheep. I have no business to go hunting after other people's sheep; but if they are my Master's sheep who shall stop me over hill or dale enquiring, "Have you seen my Master's sheep?" If any say, "You do intrude in this land," let the answer be, "We are after our Master's sheep which have strayed here!" "Excuse our pushing further than politeness might allow, we are in haste to find a lost sheep." This is your excuse for going into a house where you are not wanted, to try and leave your tract and speak a word for Christ: say, "I think my Master has one of his sheep here, and I am come after it." You have received a search-warrant from the King of kings, and therefore you have a right to enter and search after your Lord's stolen property. If men belonged to the devil we would not rob the enemy himself; but they do not belong to him; he neither made them nor bought them, and therefore we seize them in the King's name whenever we can lay hands on them. I doubt not but what there are some here this morning who neither know nor love the Saviour as yet, who nevertheless belong to the Redeemer, and he will yet bring them to himself and to his flock. Therefore it is that we preach with confidence. I do not come into this pulpit hoping that peradventure somebody will of his own free will return to Christ; that may be so or not, but my hope lies in another

quarter; I hope that my Master will lay hold of some of them and say, "You are mine, and you shall be mine; I claim you for myself." My hope arises from the freeness of grace, and not from the freedom of the will. A poor haul of fish will any gospel fisherman make if he takes none but those who are eager to leap into the net. Oh, for an hour of Jesus among this crowd! Oh, for five minutes of the great Shepherd's handiwork! When the good Shepherd overtakes his lost sheep he has not much to say to it. According to the parable he says nothing, but he lays hold of it, lays it on his shoulders and carries it home, and that is what I want the Lord to do this morning with some of you whose will is all the other way, whose wishes and desires are all contrary to him. I want him to come with sacred violence and mighty love to restore you to your Father and your God. Not that you will be saved against your will, but your consent will be sweetly gained. Oh, that the Lord Jesus would take you in hand and never let you go again. May he sweetly say to you, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

III. Our third head contains in it much delight. OUR LORD MUST BRING OR LEAD THOSE OTHER SHEEP. "Them also I must bring"—read it, and it will be more accurate, "them also I must lead:" Christ must be at the head of these other sheep, and they must follow his lead —"them also I must lead, and they shall hear my voice." Those who belong to Christ secretly must be openly led to follow him.

First, it is Christ that has to do it, even as he has done it hitherto. The text says, "Them *also* I must bring," and this language implies that those who have already come he has brought. All that were in the fold Christ had brought there, and all that are to be in the fold he must lead there. All of us who are saved have been saved by the mighty power of God in Christ Jesus. Is it not so? Is there anyone among us that came to Jesus without Jesus first coming to him? Surely, no. Without exception we all admit that it was his love that sought us out and brought us to be the sheep of his pasture. Now, as the Lord Jesus has done this for us he must do it for others; for they will never come except he fetch them.

Here comes in that emphatic, imperious "*must*." The proverb is that "must" is for the king, and the king may say "must" to all of us: but did you ever hear of a "must" that bound the king himself and constrained him? Kings generally do not care to have it said to them you "must;" but there is a king, the like of which king there never was nor shall be for glory and for dominion, and yet he is bound by a "*must*"—the Prince Immanuel saith, "them also I *must* bring." Whenever Jesus says "*must*" something comes of it. Who can resist the omnipotent *must*? Clear out, devils! Clear out, wicked men! Flee, darkness! Die, O death! If Jesus says "*must*" we know what is going to happen: difficulties vanish, impossibilities are achieved. Glory, glory, the Lord shall get the victory! Jesus says of his chosen, his redeemed, his espoused, his covenanted ones, "Them also I *must* bring," and therefore it must be done.

Furthermore, he tells us how he must do it. He says, "They shall hear my voice." So that our Lord is going to save people still by the gospel. I do not look for any other means of converting men beyond the simple

preaching of the gospel and the opening of men's ears to hear it—"They shall hear my voice." The old methods are to be followed to the end of the chapter. Our standing orders are,—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." We are not commissioned to do anything else but continue to preach the gospel, the selfsame gospel which saved us and which was delivered to us at the beginning. We know of no alterations, enlargements, or amendments to the gospel. We obey and follow one voice, not many voices. One gospel of salvation is to be proclaimed everywhere, and no other work is in our commission.

Then it is added, "They shall hear my voice." It is promised that they shall first lend an attentive ear and then that they shall yield a willing heart to the voice of divine love, and follow Jesus where he leads. "What then," saith one; "suppose I speak in Christ's name, and they will not hear?" Do not suppose what cannot be! The Scripture says of the chosen sheep,—"they shall hear my voice." The rest remain in their blindness, but the redeemed will hear and see. Do not again say, "Suppose they will not!" You must not suppose anything that is contrary to what Jesus promises when he says, "They shall hear my voice." The graceless may stop their ears if they will, and perish with Christ's voice as a witness against them, but his own redeemed shall hear the heavenly voice and obey it. There is no resisting this divine necessity: Jesus says—"I *must* bring them, and they *shall* hear my voice." It was with this that Paul turned to the Gentiles, and said to the Jews, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." He had no fear about the reception the word would meet with; neither ought we to entertain any, since Christ has a people who must be led, and shall hear the voice of the Bishop and Shepherd of souls.

We have heard it said that "If Christ *must* have his people, what is the good of preaching?" What would be the good of preaching if it were otherwise? Why, dear sir, this fact is one great reason why we preach. That which you suppose to be a motive for inaction is the strongest motive for energetic movement. Because the Lord has a people that must be saved we feel an imperious necessity laid upon us to join with him in bringing this people to himself. They *must* come, and we *must* fetch them: Christian brethren, do you not feel that you *must* help in compelling them to come to the wedding-feast? Is it not laid upon you that you *must* go after lost souls, that you *must* speak to them, seeing that you *must* have a hand in bringing these blood-bought ones to Christ by his Holy Spirit?

And again, are there not some in this place who feel a necessity laid upon them also that they *must* come? Do I not hear some of you saying, "I have stood out a long while, but I *must* come; I have resisted divine grace long enough, and now Christ has laid his hand on me, I *must* come." How I wish that a heavenly "must," a blessed necessity of omnipotent decree may overshadow you, and bear you as a sheep to the fold. Oh that you may now yield yourselves unto God because the love of Christ constraineth you. Submit yourselves unto God, owning the supreme authority of his grace, which shall lead every thought into captivity, that henceforth Christ may reign in your hearts, and put every enemy under his feet. He saith, "Him that cometh to

me I will in nowise cast out." "I will trust him," saith one; "I feel I must." Just so; and that trust is a mark of your election of God, for "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." "Whom he did predestinate them he also called." If he is calling you it is because he did predestinate you; and you may rest quite sure of it, and yield to him with holy joy and delight. As for me, I feel so happy in preaching the gospel, because I am not fishing with a "chance" and a "perhaps" that some may come. The Lord knoweth them that are his, and they shall come. Every congregation is, in this sense, a picked assembly. I felt this morning when I came here that there were so many friends out in the country for the holidays that we should very likely have a thin house. I rejoice that I was altogether out in my reckoning, but even then I thought, God has a people that he will bring whom he means to bless. Here they are, and now while standing here I know that God's word "shall not return to him void, but it shall accomplish that which he pleases, and shall prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it."

IV. But now, lastly, OUR LORD GUARANTEES THE UNITY OF HIS CHURCH. "Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." We hear a great deal about the unity of the church, and notions upon this subject are rather wild. We are to have the Roman and the Greek and the Anglican church all joined together in one: if they were so, the result would not be worth two-pence; but much evil would come of it. God has, I doubt not, a chosen people amongst all these three great corporations, but the union of such questionable organizations would be a dire omen of mischief to the world: the dark ages, and a worse Popedom than ever, would soon be upon us. The more those three quarrel with each other the better for truth and righteousness. I should like to see the Anglican Church standing at drawn daggers with the Roman, and coming into a more and more open opposition to its superstitions. I would to God that the national church would in all things be delivered from the Pope of Rome and his Antichristian enormities.

Truly, this has been carried out as a matter of fact; there never was but one Shepherd of the sheep yet, even Christ Jesus; and there never was but one flock of God yet, and there never will be. There is one spiritual church of God, and there never were two. All the visible churches up and down the world contain within themselves parts of the one church of Jesus Christ, but there were never two bodies of Christ, and there cannot be. There is one church, and there is one Head of the church: the motto of Christianity is,—one flock and one Shepherd.

As a matter of experience this is carried out in believers. I do not care who the man is, if he is a truly spiritually-minded man he is one with all other spiritually-minded men. Those people in any visible church who have no grace are usually the greatest sticklers for every point of difference and ever particle of rite and form. Nominal professors are soon at war, quickened believers follow after peace Of course, when a man has nothing else but the outside, he fights for it tooth and nail; but a man who loves the Lord, and lives near him, perceives the inner life in others, and has fellowship therewith: that inner life is one in all the quickened family, and compels them to be one in heart.

Set two brethren at prayer, the one a Calvinist and the other an Arminian, and they pray alike. Get a real work of the Spirit in a district and see how Baptists and Pædo-Baptists pull together. Tell out your inward experience and speak of the Spirit's work in the soul, and see how we are all moved thereby. Here is a brother, a member of the Society of Friends, and he likes silent worship; and here is another who enjoys hearty singing; but when they get near to God they do not quarrel over this, but agree to differ: the one says, "The Lord be with you in your holy silence," and the other prays that the Lord may accept his brother's psalm. All who are one with Christ have a certain family feeling, a higher form of clannishness, and they cannot shake it off. I have found myself reading a gracious book which has drawn me near to God, and though I have known that it was written by a man with whose opinions I had little agreement, I have not therefore refused to be edified by him in points which are unquestionably revealed. No, but I have blessed the Lord that, with all his blunders, he knew so much of precious vital truth, and lived so near his Lord. What Protestant can refuse to love the holy Bernard? Was there ever a more consecrated servant of God or a dearer lover of Christ than he? Yet he was most sorrowfully in bondage to the superstitions of his age and of the Romish Church. Are you not all one with him who sang—

"Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest"?

The external church is needful, but it is not *the one and indivisible church of Christ.* Jesus as the life binds his church together, and that life flows through all the regenerate, even as the blood flows through all the veins of the body. Drop the external, and look by faith into the spiritual realm and you will see one flock and one Shepherd.

The practical lesson is, let us belong to that one flock. How are they known? Answer: they are a hearing flock—they hear the Lord and follow his lead. Be you one of those who listen to Christ's voice, and to none besides. Keep to the one Shepherd! How do you know him? It is Jesus: in his feet and hands are nail-prints, and his side bears yet the scar. He it is who leads the one only flock. Follow Jesus and you are right. Follow him everywhere and you are happy. The best way to promote the unity of the church is for all the sheep to follow the Shepherd. If they all follow the Shepherd they will all keep together. Let us go forth and try and do that, and let us long for that happy day when all disputed points shall be settled by all obeying the Lord. Compromises would only mean an agreement to disobey the Lord. Let no man yield a principle under pretence of charity: it is not charity to call falsehood truth. We must follow Jesus fully, and we shall come together. First pure then peaceable is the rule. Oh, when shall the triple banner again float over all,—"*One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism!*" Oh, God the Holy Ghost, forgive us our errors, and bring us to thy truth! Oh, God the Son, forgive us our want of holiness, and renew us in thine own image! Oh, God the Father, forgive us our want of love, and melt us into one family. To the one God be glory, in the one church, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Sheep and Their Shepherd

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"—John x. 27.

CHRISTIANS are here compared to sheep. Not a very flattering comparison you may say; but then we do not wish to be flattered, nor would our Lord deem it good to flatter us. While far from flattering, it is, however, eminently consoling, for of all creatures there are not any more compassed about with infirmity than sheep. In this frailty of their nature they are a fit emblem of ourselves; at least, of so many of us as have believed in Jesus and become his disciples. Let others boast how strong they are; yet if there be strong ones anywhere, certainly we are weak. We have proved our weakness, and day by day we lament it. We do confess our weakness; yet may we not repine at it, for, as Paul said, so we find, when we are weak then are we strong. Sheep have many wants, yet they are very helpless, and quite unable to provide for themselves. But for the shepherd's care they would soon perish. This, too, is our case. Our spiritual needs are numerous and pressing, yet we cannot supply any of them. We are travellers through a wilderness that yields us neither food nor water. Unless our bread drop down from heaven, and our water flow out of the living rock, we must die. Our weakness and our want we keenly feel: still we have no cause to murmur, since the Lord knows our poor estate, and succours us with the tenderest care. Sheep, too, are silly creatures, and in this respect likewise we are very sheepish. We meekly own it to him who is ready to guide us. We say, as David said, "O God, thou knowest my foolishness;" and he says to us as he said to David, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." If Christ were not our wisdom, we should soon fall a prey to the destroyer. Every grain of true wisdom that we possess we have derived from him; of ourselves we are dull and giddy; folly is bound up in our heart. The more conscious you are, dear brethren, of your own deficiencies, your lack of stamina, discretion, sagacity, and all the instincts of self-preservation, the more delighted you will be to see that the Lord accepts you under these conditions, and calls you

the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. He discerns you as you are, claims you as his own, foresees all the ills to which you are exposed, yet tends you as his flock, sets store by every lamb of the fold, and so feeds you according to the integrity of his heart, and guides you by the skilfulness of his hands. "*I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.*" Oh, what sweet music there is to us in the name which is given to our Lord Jesus Christ of "the good Shepherd"! It not only describes the office he holds, but it sets forth the sympathy he feels, the aptness he shows, and the responsibility he bears to promote our well-being. What if the sheep be weak, yet is the shepherd strong to guard his flock from the prowling wolf or the roaring lion. If the sheep suffer privation because the soil is barren, yet is the shepherd able to lead them into pasturage suitable for them. If they be foolish, yet he goes before them, cheers them with his voice, and rules them with the rod of his command. There cannot be a flock without a shepherd; neither is there a shepherd truly without a flock. The two must go together. They are the fulness of each other. As the church is the fulness of him that filleth all in all, so we rejoice to remember that "of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." That I am like a sheep is a sorry reflection; but that I have a shepherd charms away the sorrow and creates a new joy. It even becomes a gladsome thing to be weak, that I may rely on his strength; to be full of wants, that I may draw from his fulness; to be shallow and often at my wit's end, that I may be always regulated by his wisdom. Even so doth my shame redound to his praise. Not to you, ye great and mighty, who lift your heads high, and claim for yourselves honour: not for you is peace, not to you is rest; but unto you, ye lowly ones, who delight in the valley of humiliation, and feel yourselves to be taken down in your own esteem—to you it is that the Shepherd becomes dear; and to you will he give to lie down in green pastures beside the still waters.

In a very simple way, we shall speak about the proprietor of the sheep. "*My* sheep," says Christ. Then, we shall have a little to say about the marks of the sheep. After that I propose to talk awhile about the privileges of the sheep. "I *know* my sheep:" they are privileged to be known of Christ. "My sheep hear my voice."

I. Who is the proprietor of the sheep? They are all Christ's. "*My* sheep hear my voice." How came the saints to be Christ's?

They are his, first of all, because he chose them. Ere the worlds were made, out of all the rest of mankind he selected them. He knew the race would fall, and become unworthy of the faculties with which he endowed them, and the inheritance he had assigned them. To him belonged the sovereign prerogative that he might have mercy on whom he would have mercy; and he, out of his own absolute will, and according to the counsel of his own good pleasure, made choice severally and individually of certain persons, and he said, "These are mine." Their names were written in his book: they became his portion and his heritage. Having chosen them of old so many ages ago, rest assured he will not lose them now. Men prize that which they have long had. If there is a thing that was mine but yesterday, and it is lost to-day, I might not fret about it; but if I have long possessed it, and

called it my patrimony, I would not willingly part with it. Sheep of Christ, ye shall be his for ever, because ye have been his from ever. They are Christ's sheep, because his Father gave them to him. They were the gift of the Father to Christ. He often speaks of them in this way. "As many as thou hast given me:" "Thou hast given them me," saith he, over and over again. Of old, the Father gave his people to Christ. Separating them from among men, he presented them to him as a gift, committed them into his hand as a trust, and ordained them for him as the lot of his inheritance. Thus they become a token of the Father's love to his only begotten Son, a proof of the confidence he reposed in him, and a pledge of the honour that shall be done unto him. Now, I suppose we most of us know how to value a gift for the donor's sake. If presented to us by one whom we love, we set great store by it. If it has been designed to be a love-token, it awakens in our minds many sweet memories. Though the intrinsic worth may be of small account, the associations make it exceedingly precious. We might be content to lose something of far greater value in itself rather than that which is the gift of a friend, the offering of his love. I like the delicate sentiment of the poet, as it is expressed in that pretty verse—

> "I never cast a flower away,
> The gift of one who cared for me;
> A little flower—a faded flower,
> But it was done reluctantly."

Yet, oh, how weak the words of human passion! but, oh, how strong the expressions of divine ardour, when Jesus speaks to the Father of "the men whom thou gavest me out of the world"! "Thine they were," he says, "and thou gavest them me; and those that thou gavest me I have kept." Ye sheep of Christ, rest safely; let not your soul be disturbed with fear. The Father gave you to his Son, and he will not lightly lose what God himself has given him. The infernal lions shall not rend the meanest lamb that is a love-token from the Father to his best Beloved. While Christ stands defending his own, he will protect them from the lion and the bear, that would take the lambs of his flock; he will not suffer the least of them to perish.

"*My sheep*," says Christ. They are his, furthermore, because, in addition to his choice and to the gift, he has bought them with a price. They had sold themselves for nought; but he has redeemed them, not with corruptible things as with silver and gold, but with his precious blood. A man always esteems that to be exceedingly valuable which he procured with risk—with risk of life and limb. David felt he could not drink the water that the brave warriors who broke through the host of the Philistines brought to him from the well at Bethlehem, because it seemed to him as though it were the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives; and he poured it out before the Lord. It was too precious a draught for him, when men's lives had been hazarded for it. But the good Shepherd not only hazarded his life, but even laid it down for his sheep. Jacob exceedingly valued one part of his possessions, and he gave it to Joseph: he gave him one portion above his brethren. Now, you may be sure he would give Joseph that which he thought most precious. But why did he give him

that particular portion? Because, he says, "I took it out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Now, our blessed Shepherd esteems his sheep because they cost him his blood. They cost him his blood—I may say, he took them out of the hand of the Amorite with his sword and with his bow in bloody conflict, where he was victor, but yet was slain. There is not one sheep of all his flock but what he can see the mark of his blood on him. In the face of every saint the Saviour sees, as in a glass, the memorial of his bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and his agonies at Golgotha. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." That stands as a call to duty, but it is at the same time a consolation, for if he has bought me, he will have me. Bought with such a price, he will not like to lose me, nor suffer any foe to take me out of his hand. Think not that Christ will suffer those to perish for whom he died. To me the very suggestion seems to draw near to the verge of blasphemy. If he has bought me with his blood, I cannot conceive he cares nothing for me, will take no further concern about me, or will suffer my soul to be cast into the pit. If he has suffered in my stead, where is justice gone that the substitute should bear my guilt, and I should bear it too? and where is mercy fled, that God should execute twice the punishment for one offence? Nay, beloved, those whom he hath bought with blood are his, and he will keep them.

"*My sheep*," says Christ. They are his, or in due time they shall become so, through his capturing them by sacred power. As well by power are we redeemed as by price, for the blood-bought sheep had gone astray even as others. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;" but, my brethren, the good shepherd has brought many of us back with infinite condescension: with boundless mercy he followed us when we went astray. Oh, what blind slaves we were when we sported with death! We did not know then what his love had ordained for us: it never entered our poor, silly heads that there was a crown for us; we did not know that the Father's love had settled itself on us, or ever the day-star knew its place. We know it now, and it is he that has taught us; for he followed us over mountains of vanity, through bogs and miry places of foul transgression; tracked our devious footsteps on and on, through youth and manhood, till at last, with mighty grace, he grasped us in his arms and laid us on his shoulder, and is this day carrying us home to the great fold above, rejoicing as he bears all our weight and finds us in all we need. Oh, that blessed work of effectual grace! He has made us his own, he has defeated the enemy, the prey has been taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive has been delivered. "He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron asunder," to set his people free. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

"MY SHEEP," saith Christ, as he stands in the midst of his disciples. "My Shepherd," let us one and all reply. All the sheep of Christ who have been redeemed by his power, become his by their own willing and cheerful surrender of themselves to him. We would not belong to another if we might; nor would we wish to belong to ourselves if we could; nor, I trust, do we want any part of ourselves to be our own property.

Judge ye whether this be true of you or not. In that day when I surrendered my soul to my Saviour, I gave him my body, my soul, my spirit; I gave him all I had, and all I shall have for time and for eternity. I gave him all my talents, my powers, my faculties, my eyes, my ears, my limbs, my emotions, my judgment, my whole manhood, and all that could come of it, whatever fresh capacity or new capability I may be endowed with. Were I at this good hour to change the note of gladness for one of sadness, it should be to wail out my penitent confession of the times and circumstances in which I have failed to observe the strict and unwavering allegiance I owe to my Lord. So far from regretting, I would fain renew my vows and make them over again. In this I think every Christian would join.

"'Tis done! the great transaction's done:
I am my Lord's, and he is mine:
He drew me, and I follow'd on,
Charm'd to confess the voice divine.

Now rest, my long-divided heart;
Fix'd on this blissful centre, rest:
With ashes who would grudge to part,
When call'd on angels' bread to feast?

High heaven, that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renew'd shall daily hear:
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."

And yet, brethren, though our hearts may now be all in a glow, lest they should presently grow cold, or the bleak atmosphere of this evil world should chill our devotion, let us never cease to think of the good Shepherd in that great, good act, which most of all showed his love when he laid down his life for the sheep. You have heard the story told by Francis de Sales. He saw a girl carrying a pail of water on her head, in the midst of which she had placed a piece of wood. On asking her why she did this, she told him it was to prevent the motion of the water, for fear it might be spilt. And so, said he, let us place the cross of Christ in the midst of our hearts to check the movement of our affections, that they may not be spilt in restless cares or grievous troubles.

"*My sheep*," says Christ, and thus he describes his people. They are Christ's, his own, a peculiar property. May I hope that this truth will be henceforth treasured up in your soul! It is a common truth, certainly; but when it is laid home by the Holy Spirit it shines, it beams, not merely as a lamp in a dark chamber, but as the day-star rising in your hearts. Remember this is no more our shame that we are sheep, but it is our honour that we are Christ's sheep. To belong to a king carries some measure of distinction. We are the sheep of the imperial pastures. This is our safety: he will not suffer the enemy to destroy his sheep. This is our sanctity: we are separated, the sheep of the pasture of the Lord's Christ. This is sanctification in one aspect of it: for it is the making of us holy, by setting us apart to be the Lord's own portion for ever. And this is the key to our duty: we are his sheep: then let us live to him, and consecrate ourselves to him who loved us and gave himself for us. Christ is the proprietor of the sheep; and we are the property of the good Shepherd.

II. Now, let us commune together awhile upon the marks of the sheep. When there are so many flocks of sheep, it is necessary to mark them. Our Saviour marks us. It has been very properly observed, that there are two marks on Christ's sheep. One is on their ear, the other is on their foot. These are two marks of Christ's sheep not to be found on any other; but they are to be found on all his own—the mark on the ear: "My sheep *hear* my voice"—the mark on the foot: "I know them, and they follow me."

Think of this mark on their ear. "My sheep hear my voice." They hear spiritually. A great many people in Christ's day heard his voice who did not hear it in the way and with the perception that is here intended. They would not hear; that is to say, they would not hearken or give heed, neither would they obey his call or come unto him that they might have life. These were not always the worst sort of people: there were some of the best that would not hear Christ, of whom he said, according to the original, as translated by some, "Ye search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." They would get as far as curiosity or criticism might allure them; but they would not go any farther: they would not believe in Jesus. Now, the spiritual ear listens to God. The opening of it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and this is a mark of Christ's chosen blood-bought people, that they hear not only the hollow sound, but the hidden sense; not the bare letter, but the spiritual lesson; and that too not merely with the outward organ, but with the inward heart. The chief point is that they hear *his* voice. Oh, if all that heard my voice heard Christ's voice, how would I wander down every street in this city to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ; but, alas! the voice of the minister is utterly ineffectual to save a soul, unless the voice of Christ reach the conscience and rouse its dormant powers. "My sheep hear my voice;" the voice of Jesus, his counsel, his command, clothed with the authority of his own sacred sovereign utterance. When the gospel comes to you as Christ's gospel, with demonstration of the Spirit, the invitation is addressed to you by him. You can look upon it in no other light; so you must accept and receive it. When his princely power comes with it—being mighty to save, he puts saving power into the word—then you hear Christ's voice as a fiat that must be obeyed, as a summons that must be attended to, as a call to which there must be a quick response. O beloved, do not ever rest satisfied with hearing the voice of the preacher. We are only Christ's speaking-trumpets: there is nothing in us: it is only his speaking through us that can do any good. O children of God, some of you do not always listen to Christ's voice in the preaching. While we comment on the word, you make your comments on us. Our style, or our tone, or even our gesture, is enough to absorb—I might rather say, to distract—your thoughts. "Why look ye so earnestly on us?" I beseech you, give less heed to the livery of the servant, and give more care to the message of the Master. Listen warily, if you please; but judge wisely, if you can. See how much pure grain, and how much of Christ, there is in the sermon. Use your sieve; put away all the chaff; take only the good wheat; hear Christ's voice. Well were it if we could

obscure ourselves that we might manifest him. I could wish so to preach that you could not see even my little finger; might I but so preach that you could get a full view of Jesus only. O that you could hear his voice drowning ours! This is the mark, the peculiar mark of those who are Christ's peculiar people: they hear his voice. Sometimes, truly, it sounds in the ministry; sometimes it thrills forth from that book of books, which is often grossly neglected; sometimes it comes in the night-watches. His voice may speak to us in the street. Silent as to vocal utterance, but like familiar tones that sometimes greet us in our dreams, the voice of Christ is distinctly audible to the soul. It will come to you in sweet or in bitter providences; yea, there is such a thing as hearing Christ's voice in the rustling of every leaf upon the tree, in the moaning of every wind, in the rippling of every wave. And there be those that have learned to lean on Christ's bosom, till they have looked for all the world as though they were a shell that lay in the ocean of Christ's love, listening for ever to the sonorous cadence of that deep, unfathomed, all-mysterious main. The billows of his love never cease to swell. The billowy anthem still peals on with solemn grandeur in the ear of the Christian. O may we hear Christ's voice each one of us for ourselves! I find that language fails me, and metaphors are weak to describe its potent spell.

One point is worth noticing, however. I think our Lord meant here that his sheep, when they hear his voice, know it so well that they can tell it at once from the voice of strangers. The true child of God knows the gospel from the law. It is not by learning catechisms, reading theological books, or listening to endless controversies, that he finds this out. There is an instinct of his regenerate nature far more trustworthy than any lessons he has been taught. The voice of Jesus! Why, there is no music like it. If you have once heard it, you cannot mistake it for another, or another for it. Some are babes in grace: others are of full age, and by reason of use, have their senses exercised; but one sense is quickly brought out—the sense of hearing. It is so easy to tell the joy-bells of the gospel from the death-knell of the law; for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. "Do, or die," says Moses. "Believe, and live," says Christ: you must know which is which. Yes; and I think they are equally shrewd and quick to discriminate between the flesh and the Spirit. Let some of the very feeblest of God's people sit down under a fluent ministry, with all the beauties of rhetoric, and let the minister preach up the dignity of human nature, and the sufficiency of man's reason to find out the way of righteousness, and you will hear them say: "It is very clever; but there is no food for me in it." Bring, however, the best and most instructed, and most learned Christian man, and set him down under a ministry that is very faulty as to the gift of utterance, and incorrect even in grammar; but if it is full of Jesus Christ, I know what he will say: "Ah! never mind the man, and never mind the platter on which he brought the meat; it was food to my soul that I fed upon with a hearty relish; it was marrow and fatness, for I could hear Christ's voice in it." I am not going to follow out these tests; but certain it is, that the sheep know Christ's voice, and can easily distinguish it. I saw hundreds of lambs the other day together, and there were also their mothers;

and I am sure if I had had the task of allotting the proper lamb to each, or to any of them, it would have kept me till now to have done it. But somehow the lambs knew the mothers, and the mothers knew the lambs; and they were all happy enough in each other's company.

Every saint here, mixed up as he may be at times with parties and professors of all sorts, knows Christ, and Christ knows him, and he is therefore bound to his owner. That is the mark on the ear. You have seen sometimes in the country two flocks together on the road, and you say: "I wonder how the shepherds will manage to keep them distinct? They will get mixed up." They do not; they go this way and that way; and after a little commingling they separate, for they know their master's voice; "and a stranger will they not follow." You will go to-morrow, many of you, out into the world, some to the Exchange, others to the market, and others again into the factory: you are all mixed. Yes; but the seeming confusion of your company is temporary, not real and permanent. You will come right again, and you will go to your own home and your own fellowship. And at the last, when we shall have ended our pilgrimage, the one shall wend his way to the glory land, and the other to the abyss of woe. There will be no mistake. You will hear the Master's call, and obey. There is a mark on the ear which identifies every saint.

Christ's sheep hear his voice obediently. This is an important proof of discipleship. Indeed, it may serve as a reproof to many. Oh, I would that you were more careful about this! "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," said Jesus, "he it is that loveth me." "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." How comes it to pass, then, that there are certain commands of Christ which some Christians will suffer to lie in abeyance? They will say, "The Lord commands this, but it is not essential." Oh, unloving spirit, that can think anything unessential that thy Bridegroom bids thee do! They that love, think little things of great moment, especially when they are looked upon as tokens of the strength or the tenderness of one's regard. It may not be essential, in order to prove the relation in which a wife stands to her husband, that she should study his tastes, consult his wishes, or attend to his comfort. But will she the less strive to please, because love, not fear, constrains her? I trow not. And can it be that any of you, my brethren, would harbour such a thought as your negligence implies? Do you really suppose that after the choice of Christ has been fixed on you, and the love of Christ has been plighted to you, you may now be as remiss or careless as you like? Nay, rather, might we not expect that a sacred passion, an ardent zeal, a touch of inspiration would stir you up, put you on the alert, make you wake at the faintest sound of his voice, or keep you listening to do his will? Be

it ours, then, to act out with fidelity that verse we have often sung with enthusiasm :—

"In all my Lord's appointed ways
My journey I'll pursue."

However little the precept may appear in the eyes of others; however insignificant as compared with our salvation, yet—doth the Lord command it?—then his sheep hear his voice, and they follow him.

Christ has marked his sheep on their feet as well as their ears. They follow him: they are gently led, not harshly driven. They follow him as the Captain of their salvation; they trust in the power of his arm to clear the way for them. All their trust on him is stayed; all their hope on him they lean. They follow him as their teacher; they call no man "Rabbi" under heaven, but Christ alone. He is the infallible source of their creeds; neither will they allow their minds to be ruled by conclaves, councils, nor decrees. Hath Christ said it? It is enough. If not, it is no more for me than the whistling of the wind. They follow Christ as their teacher.

And the sheep of Christ follow him as their example; they desire to be in this world as he was. It is one of their marks, that to a greater or less degree they have a Christ-like spirit; and if they could they would be altogether like their Lord.

They follow him, too, as their Commander, and Lawgiver, and Prince. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it," was his mother's wise speech; and it is the children's wise rule: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Oh, blessed shall they be above many of whom it shall be said, "These are they that have not defiled their garments." "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Some of his followers are not very scrupulous. They love him. It is not for us to judge them. Rather we place ourselves among them and share in the censure. But happiest of all the happy are they who see the footprint—the print of that foot that once was pierced with the nail—and put their foot down where he placed it, and then again, in the selfsame mark, follow where he trod, till they climb at last to the throne. Keep close to Christ; take care of his little precepts unto the end. Remember, "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." Do not peril being least in the heavenly kingdom, though it is better to be that than to be greatest in the kingdom of darkness. O seek to be very near him, to be a choice sheep in his chosen flock, and to have the mark distinctly upon your foot!

I will not stay to apply these truths, but leave each one of you to make such self-searching enquiries as the text suggests. Have I the ear mark? Have I the foot mark? "My sheep hear my voice," "and they follow me." I hope that I am among the number.

III. The last point, with which we now proceed to close, is—THE PRIVILEGE OF CHRIST'S SHEEP. It does not look very large, but if we open it we shall see an amazing degree of blessedness in it. "I know them," "I know them." What does it mean?

I have not time now to tell you all it means. "*I know them.*" What is the reverse of this but one of the most dreadful things that is reserved for the day of judgment? There will be some who will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils?" And he shall say, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, *I never knew you;* depart from me, ye cursed." Now measure the height of that privilege by the depth of this misery. "I never knew you." What a volume of scorn it implies! What a stigma of infamy it conveys! Change the picture. The Redeemer says, "I know them," "I know them." How his eyes flash with kindness; how their cheeks burn with gratitude, as he says, "I know them"! Why, if a man had a friend and acquaintance that he used to know, and some years after he found him a disreputable, abandoned, wicked, guilty criminal, I feel pretty sure he would not say much about having known such a fellow, though he might be driven to confess that he had some years ago a passing acquaintance with him. But our Lord Jesus Christ, though he knows what poor, unworthy ones we are, yet when we shall be brought up before the Lord, before the great white throne, he will confess he knew us. He does know us, we are old acquaintances of his, and he has known us from before the foundation of the world, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called." There are riches of grace in this; but we will consider it in another way. Our Saviour knows us, our Shepherd knows us. Beloved, he knows your person and all about you. You, with that sick body, that aching head, he knows you and he knows your soul with all its sensitiveness; that timidity, that anxiety, that constitutional depression—he knows it all. A physician may come to see you, and be unable to detect what the disease is that pains or prostrates you, but Christ knows you through and through; all the parts of your nature he understands. "I know them," saith he; he can therefore prescribe for you. He knows your sins. Do not let that dismay you, because he has blotted them all out; and he only knows them to forgive them, to cover them with his righteousness. He knows your corruptions; he will help you to overcome them; he will deal with you in providence and in grace, so that they shall be rooted up. He knows your temptations. Perhaps you are living away from your parents and Christian friends, and you have had an extraordinary temptation, and you wish you could go home and tell your mother. Oh, he knows it, he knows it; he can help you better

than your mother can. You say: "I wish the minister knew the temptation I have passed through." Do not tell it; God knows it. As Daniel did not want Nebuchadnezzar to tell him the nature of his dream, but gave him the dream and the interpretation at the same time, so God can send you comfort. There will be a word as plainly suited to your case as though it were all printed and the preacher had known it all. It must be so. Depend upon it, the Lord knows your temptation, and watches your trial; or be it a sick child, or be it a bad matter of business that has lately occurred; or be it a slander that has wounded your heart, there is not a pang you feel but God as surely sees it as the weaver sees the shuttle which he throws with his own hand. He knows your trial, and he knows the meaning of your groans: he can read the secret desire of your heart. You need not write it nor speak it: he has understood it all. You were saying: "O that my child were converted! O that I grew in grace!" He knows it: he knows it every whit. There is not a word on your tongue, nor a wish in your heart, but he knoweth it altogether. O dear heart, he knows your sincerity! Perhaps you want to join the church, and your proposal has been declined, because you could not give satisfactory testimony. If you are sincere, he knows it; he knows, moreover, what your anxiety is. You cannot tell another what it is that is bitter to you—the heart knoweth its own bitterness—he knows it. As his secret is with you, so your secret is with him. He knows you: he knows what you have been trying to do. That secret gift—that offering dropped so quietly where none could see it—he knows it. And he knows that you love him. "Yes," you are saying in your soul, "if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now." No, you cannot tell him, nor tell others; but he knows it all.

So, now, in closing, let us say that in the text there is mutual knowledge. "I know them, but they also know me, because they hear my voice, and recognise it." Here is mutual confession. Christ speaks, else there would be no voice: they hear, else were the voice not useful. "I know them;" that is his thoughts go towards them. "They follow me;" that is, their thoughts go towards him. He leads the way, else they could not follow. They follow, however, when he leads the way. Being the counterpart of each other, what the one does the other returns through grace; and what grace puts into the sheep the shepherd recognises, and makes a return to them. Christ and his church become an echo of each other: his the voice, theirs is but a faint echo of it; still it is a true echo, and you shall know who are Christ's by this. Do they echo what Christ saith? Oh, how I wish we were all sheep! How my soul longs that we may many of us who are not of his fold be brought in. The Lord bring you in, my dear hearers. The Lord give you his grace, and make you his own, comfort

you, and make you to follow him. And if you are his, show it. These, dear brethren and sisters, here at this time, desire to confess Christ in your presence. If they are doing right, and you are not doing as they do, then you are doing wrong. If it is the duty of one, it is the duty of all; and if one Christian may neglect making a profession, all may do so, and then there will be no visible church whatever, and the visible ordinances must die out. If you know him, own him, for he hath said: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

The Security of Believers
or
Sheep Who Shall Never Perish

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one"—John x. 27—30.

Our Saviour did not hesitate to preach the deeper doctrines of the gospel to the most miscellaneous assembly. When he began to preach where he was brought up, they all gathered with admiration about him, until he preached the doctrine of election; and then, straightway, they were so maddened that they would have destroyed him. They could not bear to hear of the widows of Israel passed by, and the woman of Sarepta chosen; nor of a heathen leper healed, while the many lepers of their own race were left to die. Election seems to heat the blood and fire the wrath of many. Not that they care to be chosen of God themselves; but, like the dog in the manger, they would keep other people out of the privilege. Not even to prevent these displays of bad temper did our Lord keep back the discriminating truths of the Word. Here, when addressing the Jews, he did not hesitate to speak, even to a rude rabble, concerning that glorious doctrine. He says, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you." He does not lower the standard of doctrine; but he holds his ground, and carries the war into the enemy's camp. The notion that certain truths are not fit to be preached to a general assembly, but are to be kept for the special gathering of the saints, is, I believe, horribly mischievous. Christ has not commanded us to keep a part of our teaching *sub rosâ;* reserved from the common folk, and set aside for the priests alone. He is for openly proclaiming all truth. "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops." There is no truth that

we need be ashamed of, and there is no truth that will do any harm. We grant you that every truth can be twisted; but even this would be a less evil than the concealment of it. Whatever the doctrine may be, ungodly men can pervert it according to their own lusts; and if we have to stop preaching a doctrine because of the possibility of perverting it, we shall never preach anything at all, for every truth may be perverted, and made to be the mother of infinite mischief. Our Saviour did not teach his disciples to keep certain things for the instructed few who were able to receive them; but he bade us publish all the great truths, since they are necessary for conviction, for conversion, for edification, for sanctification, and for the perfecting of the people of God. Even to his brutish opponents he exhibited but little reserve. He flashed in the faces of his adversaries this grand, but humbling truth, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep." Your unbelief is just an evidence that you were not chosen, that you have not been called by the Spirit of God, and that you are still in your sins.

The Jews had said to him, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." They professed that they wanted to know more certainly concerning him. This was a vain pretence, for he had told them all they needed to know, and they had not believed him. Therefore he answered them to a large degree by making them know more about themselves. Sometimes the point in which a man is deficient is not as to the gospel, but as to his own need of it. He may know all of Christ that is needful for his salvation, but he may not know enough about himself and his own lost condition; and therefore he is not in the way in which Christ becomes precious to him, because he is ignorant of his deep and terrible need. So the Saviour began to talk to them, not so much about himself as about his people, and what they were to be. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

I pray God, the Holy Ghost, to bless the word to many, that they may learn more about the work of Christ in their hearts, and more about their need of it, and thus may be led to seek Jesus, and find him to-night as their Saviour and their Shepherd.

There are two things in my text which will suffice for our meditation. First, here is *a description given* of the Lord's people. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." And then, secondly, there is *a privilege secured* to them, namely, their everlasting, unquestionable safety. "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

I. First, and all that I can say will be but little, considering the largeness of the subject, let us notice THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

They are first described by *a speciality of possession*: "*My* sheep." All men are not sheep, for some are foxes, or ravening wolves, and others are compared to dogs and lions. All persons who might be called sheep are not Christ's sheep. All do not belong to his flock. All are not gathered into his fold. There is a speciality of possession.

There may be many sheep, but the Saviour speaks of "*My* sheep," those whom he chose of old, those who were given him of the Father, those who have been bought with his blood, redeemed from among men, and in due time have been ransomed by his power, for he has bought them back from the hand of the enemy, and therefore claims them to be his own. "The Lord's portion is his people." Other lords have their portion, and Christ takes his portion. His people are the lot of his inheritance. He speaks of "*my* sheep" as a peculiar heritage, whom, as a shepherd, he claims for his own. Of these he is the sole Owner. He is not merely their Keeper, but their Possessor. We read of the hireling shepherd, "whose own the sheep are not"; but in the case of our good Shepherd, "he putteth forth his own sheep."

There is *a speciality of character* about them. They are "my *sheep*." They are dependent, timid, trembling, obedient, teachable; they are made sheep by his own Spirit. They have received a nature which is not that of the doggish world, nor that of the swinish multitude, nor that of the wolfish persecutor; but that of men indwelt of the Spirit of God, who are therefore clean, gentle, loving, gracious. He calls them "My sheep," for they have a special relation to himself: they are like Jesus. Being his sheep, he has become their Guardian as well as their Proprietor, and they look up to him as such. They are sheep to him, and he is a shepherd to them.

We may judge ourselves to-night by considering whether towards Christ we are his sheep. Do we acknowledge ourselves as belonging to him, spirit, soul, and body? Do we regard ourselves as being, in relation to him, no wiser, no stronger, than sheep to a shepherd? I know some who are certainly no sheep of Christ's flock, for they will be led by nobody in heaven, or on earth; but must have their own sweet way. They are critics of the Bible, not disciples of it. They might be very good dogs, but they are very queer sheep. They would make very respectable wolves, for they are great in destructive criticism; but they certainly are not sheep; and their temper and spirit are such that they would disdain the character, if they understood it. "What! to go where I am led? To lie down where I am bidden to lie down? Not to choose my own way? Just to see nothing, and know nothing; but to have my eyes in *his* head, and my wisdom in *his* mind? To be shepherded by another mind than my own? Is it so? Am I to be nothing but a sheep to the Lord Jesus?" Yes, it is even so; and hence the modern wise man is indignant, and proudly repudiates the character of a sheep. As for us, we accept all that the name implies. O brethren, we can play the man before other people, but when we come before our Lord, as the sheep is a mere animal in comparison with its shepherd, we feel ourselves to be less than that. How often have we cried with David, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee"! O my Lord, in thy presence I sink as low as low can be, and thou becomest very high, yea, all in all to me, the Shepherd of my weak, vacillating, trembling spirit! There is a speciality, then, about these people in the description. I have only time to hint at it.

A chief mark of Christ's people is attention. "My sheep *hear*."

They can hear, because they have had spiritual ears given them. Once the Shepherd might have spoken all day long, and they would not have heard him; but it is not so now. Even from the cross our Lord's plaintive cries were all unheard by them; but now he has given them spiritual capacity and perception, and they can hear, and they do hear what his dying love would make them know and understand. Their Lord has spoken to them. They have heard his voice, and have known it to be his; they still hear it, and they distinguish between his voice and other voices. "A stranger will they not follow: for they know not the voice of strangers." They now so hear that voice as to hear it in a true way; and joyfully to own it by obeying it. Do you not say, sometimes, to a child that is disobedient, "Did you not hear me speak, child?" So Christ may say to many who hear with the outward ear, but who will not yield obedience, that they have not heard him; for indeed they have not hearkened with the inner ear. Their ear does not reach down to their heart; and thus, for spiritual purposes, it is no ear at all. It is an awful thing when the ear is a closed-up passage, shut against the voice of the Saviour. You can tell the sheep of Christ by their being marked in the ear. "My sheep hear my voice." They may not hear a good deal that other people hear; they may even be glad to be deaf to it. There are many calls exceedingly musical to carnal ears, which have no charms for them. They try to be deaf to some voices from which they could gather nothing but temptation; but they hear Christ's voice. They are all there when he speaks: their soul sits at the door to hear his softest whisper. They try to hear: they charge themselves to take heed that they lose no sound from heaven. They do hear; but they long to hear yet more completely, and to be more obedient to that voice which rings through the chambers of their soul. Oh, what a hearing we have sometimes given to Christ! I have heard him with my body, my soul, my spirit; at least, I have thought so; but whether in the body, or out of the body, I could not tell. If in the body, every pore has been an ear for my Lord's sweet voice. As though my blood were tingling from the crown of my head to the sole of my foot, so has my spirit been wholly and entirely affected by the charming tones of the voice of the Well-beloved. Oh, that he would speak to-night! Can you not hear him? Beloved, is he not now calling us? Do you not rejoice to hear him?

> No music's like his charming voice,
> Nor half so sweet can be.

So, you see, a noteworthy speciality of the elect ones lies in their attention to Jesus, their Shepherd. He calls in vain to others; but his sheep hear his voice.

Another mark of the Lord's people is intimacy. "My sheep hear my voice, and *I know them.*" "I know them." Yes, *the Lord discerns them.* He singles them out, for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." Sometimes *we* do not know them; but he says, "I know them." In cloudy times they do not know themselves; but he says, "I know them." When a child of God does not know whether he is a child of God or not, his Father knows his own children,

and the great Shepherd knows his own sheep. His is a discernment which never fails. The hypocrite cannot get into the true fold of Christ. He may get into the visible fold; but not into the real spiritual fold of Christ; for Christ does not know him, and bids him depart. This is the very seal upon the foundation—"The Lord knoweth them that are his." His eyes discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not; his is a knowledge of quick and certain discernment.

But this might make us tremble if we did not know that the expression, "I know them," means *a knowledge of approbation*. "I know them," says the Shepherd; "I take a delight in them. I know their secret sighs and mournings. I hear their private prayers. I know their praises in the silence of their hearts. I know their consecration, and their aspirations after perfect service. I know their longings and their lovings. I know how they delight in me. I know how they trust my promise. I know how they look to my atoning blood. I know how in their inmost souls they rejoice in my name. I know them, and approve their secret thoughts." O sweet word, understood in that sense! And this is one part of the character of the Lord's people—that he did foreknow them in his sovereign grace; and now he personally knows them by taking a delight in them.

This divine complacency leads to a very *intense observation* of them. "He knoweth the way that I take." "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous." He has an eye upon them, and marks their paths. His ears are open to their cry, and he hears their petitions. Though there be all the world for his omniscience to consider, yet he looks upon each one of his saints as much as if there were only that one person in the universe. Oh, to think of this! "I know them," sounds like music in this sense. He that knows the stars, and knows the infinite multitude of living creatures in the universe, has a special and peculiar knowledge of his own chosen. "I know them," says he; and he intends thereby an intense observation.

Now, beloved, just try a little here, to see whether you come into this number—"I know them." Does the Lord know you as his own? Has he had personal intercourse with you, and you with him? Or will he have to say to you at the last, "I never knew you"? Why, some of you have made him know you! You have gone to him in such trials, and in such troubles, and you have cried to him in such bitterness and anguish, that, if he asks your name, you can say—

> "Once a sinner near despair
> Sought thy mercy-seat by prayer;
> Mercy heard, and set him free;
> Lord, that mercy came to *me!*"

When thou didst help me in great need, when thou didst pass by my great sin, then didst thou know me, O my Lord! "Dost thou ask me who I am? Ah, my Lord! thou knowest my name." Just as some men know right well the importunate beggar who is often at their door, so does the Lord for certain know some of you, for you go every day begging at his gate, and you receive a constant alms at his hand. Besides that, you go every day thanking him for the mercies you

receive. He knows your name: the name of one who is drowned in debt to his infinite bounty. He can never forget your groans and cries; and day by day your praises are a memorial to him. By his love, and pity, and compassion, he is sure to remember you. Sooner can a woman forget her sucking-child than your God forget you.

Well, here are things well worth the noting—speciality, attention, and intimacy. Are these yours?

But here is one more: *actual obedience.* How does he put it? "I know them, and *they follow me.*" All the Lord's sheep are marked in the foot, as well as in the ear. The foot and ear-mark must be in every sheep of the Lord's flock. "They follow me." That is to say, they openly avow him as their Shepherd. Other shepherds come, and other sheep go after them; but these sheep know the Lord Jesus, and they follow him. He alone is their Leader. They are not ashamed to own it. They take up the cross, and follow the Cross-bearer, and they bear his name.

More than that, they practically carry out their open avowal, and they follow him in daily life, copying his example. They not only say, "He is my Leader," but they follow him. Christ's sheep try to follow in the track that the Shepherd marks for them. Christ's people are never so happy as when they can put down their feet where Christ put his feet down. The very marks that he has left by his bleeding footsteps we would desire to follow, all the day, and every day. Beloved, look you carefully to this! Do what Jesus did, according to your measure and power. This is what the people of God try to do. If you do not endeavour to be like Christ, you are not his sheep; for of his sheep it is true, "I know them, and they follow me."

And this is personally operative upon them. I could not tell you exactly in English words, but the Greek word gives here a kind of personality to the whole company. "My sheep hear my voice," that is, the whole of the flock of God. "I know them," that is, again, the whole flock of them, altogether. But, "they follow me," is in the plural number. It is as though it said, "They, each one, follow me." We, who are the Lord's chosen, hear *en masse,* and the Lord knows the whole church, for, as a whole, it is redeemed by Christ; but we individually follow—each one for himself, through grace. We each one follow him. "They follow *me.*" I like that singular personal pronoun. It is not written, "They follow my commandments," though they do. It is not said, "They follow the route that I have mapped for them," though they do that. But, "they follow *me,*" distinctly. In their individual personality they follow their Lord in his individual personality. They have recognized himself above his words, above his ways, and even above his salvation. "They follow me," saith he. This is a grand mark of a Christian, not merely a life of morality, a life of integrity, a life of holiness, but a life of all these in connection with Christ. They follow *him,* not holiness, nor morality, nor integrity, apart from Christ, but they follow *their Lord.* A good life is good in any man. We cannot speak evil of virtue, even when we find it in the ordinary moralist; but this is not the complete mark of Christ's sheep. The virtues of Christ's sheep are *in connection with himself.* The Christian is holy, and all that, but that is because he follows his

perfect Master, and keeps close to him. This is one of the peculiar and unfailing marks of the child of God.

I have run through, very briefly, the description, and I now leave you to meditate upon it when you are alone. This description of the sheep of Christ is worthy of reading, marking, and inwardly digesting.

II. But my main object to-night is to show you THE GREAT PRIVILEGE HERE CONFERRED ON THE PEOPLE OF GOD. Christ has secured to them the priceless boon of eternal security in him. No sheep of Christ shall ever be lost. None that he has purchased with his blood, and made to be his own, shall ever wander away so as to perish at last. This is the doctrine of the verses now before us. At any rate, if I wanted to express that doctrine, I could not find words in which I could set it forth more definitely, or more completely, than is done by the words before me.

The security of the people of God lies, first of all, in *the character of the life which they have received.* Listen to this: "And I give unto them ETERNAL LIFE." All the spiritual life which all the sheep in the flock now possess has been given to them by their Shepherd. Never was there another flock of which this could be said. No shepherd but this one can give life to his sheep; but he gave them all the true life that they have. Nay, stop: he not only gave them life, but he sustains that life by a constant gift. Observe, it is not written, "I *gave* to them eternal life," but "I *give* unto them eternal life." They are always living by virtue of the life which he is always giving. They are constantly receiving life from him, according to that assurance, "Because I live, ye shall live also." What he always gives they must always receive, and therefore it cannot cease.

Notice the nature of that life. "I give unto my sheep *eternal* life." Now, you all know what "eternal" means: or say, rather, none of you can form an idea of eternity which can grasp all its length of endurance. Only this, you know it has no end, and cannot therefore close. If anybody said that he had eternal life and lost it, he would be flatly contradicting himself. It could not be eternal, or else he must still have it. If it is eternal, it *is* eternal, and there is no end to it; and there is an end of further argument about it. If the life that Christ gives us, when we are born again, can die, it is not "eternal" life, or else words have ceased to have any meaning at all. In its nature, as being the work of the Holy Spirit, and an emanation from God, the life bestowed in regeneration is an undying one. Has not the Holy Ghost described us as "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever"? The life of God imparted by the Holy Ghost must live for ever. As the gift is continuous, and it is always being given, and as it is in itself eternal life, it must always exist.

But, principally, I dwell upon *the glorious character of the Giver.* "*I* give unto my sheep eternal life." The life that Christ gives is not that poor, paltry life which lasts the professor for about three weeks, and then dwindles down, and dies out; or, say, three months, and then the revival is over, and the convert is spun out and done for, and has to begin again. Such is the religious life which is excited by men; but it is not so with the life which comes from God. I said that

the false convert begins again, though how he begins again I know not, because I read in Scripture of people being born again; but I have never read of their being born again, and again, and again, and again. I am told that some of our religionists have had their people converted and born again more times than they can count; and I heard that a woman had been born again twelve times down at a certain meeting; but he who stated the fact said shrewdly that he feared it was not done well the last time. No, I do not think it will ever be done well in that way. He that is born again, according to Scripture, has received eternal life; and this is the only life worth receiving. I would not preach my very soul away in order to proclaim such a twopenny, trumpery, temporary salvation as that; but to preach the Lord Jesus as giving *eternal* life is worth living for and dying for. I tell you, sirs, it is this that brought me to Christ. While I was yet young, and thinking over matters, I saw young lads that were brought up with me, excellent in character, who left their homes to be apprenticed, and after a while the temptations of the world overcame them, and they went astray, and had no religion at all. But when I read that Christ gave his sheep eternal life, I looked at it as a kind of moral life insurance for my soul, and I came to Christ, and trusted him to keep me to the end. I shall suffer a grievous disappointment if I ever find out that the life of God in me is not eternal, and that the new birth does not assure final perseverance. I did not go up to the booking-office, and take a ticket for a quarter of the distance to heaven; but I took my ticket all the way through. I trust, nay, I know, that according to my faith, so will it be unto me. I am very glad to have my through-ticket with me, and I believe that unless the train of Almighty grace smashes up—which it never will—I shall get through to the Celestial terminus as surely as ever divine power can draw me there; for so it is written, "I give unto my sheep eternal life."

Now, depend upon it, it is what you hold out to people that has much to do with how they behave themselves afterwards. Tell them that if they believe in Christ, they are going to get, not eternal life, but life for a little while—life for as long as they take good care of it, and I fear it will prove to be so. It may do them good to get the poor little change you offer them; but as surely as they are converted to a temporary life, they will die out before long. You told them that they would. You did not propose any more to them. But when you propose to them this—"Here is everlasting life to be had by believing in Christ. It is not temporary, but eternal life"—why, then they grip it as such. They believe in Christ for that, and according to their faith it is unto them; and the Lord and Giver of life is glorified in giving to them this great and splendid gift, the gift of all gifts. "I give unto my sheep eternal life."

I do not know in what other way to preach from this text than the one in which I am preaching from it. Somebody says, "Oh, that is Calvinism!" I do not care what it is. It is Scriptural. I have this inspired Book before me, and I cannot see any meaning in the words before me, if they do not mean that those who have received life from the Lord Jesus have an endless inheritance. I cannot make them

mean anything else. "I give unto my sheep eternal life," must mean that believers are eternally secure. "It is dangerous doctrine," cries one. I have not found it dangerous, and I have tried it these many years. I conceive that it would be far more dangerous to tell people that they could be truly converted, and yet the work of grace would end in six months, and then they could come back again, and begin again, and do so as many times as they liked; whereas the Word of God tells them that if they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance. Men may fall and be restored; but if they fall away utterly, there remains no other work which can be done for them. If this everlasting life could die, the Holy Ghost would have done his best, and nothing more would remain to be done. If it were so that this salt which is good should lose its savour, wherewith could it be salted? See what a gulf opens before you; and do not look for a work which will not endure every possible strain. Oh, that you may get this eternal life!

So we take a step farther. The children of God are safe, again, not only because of the life they receive, but because of *the inner dangers which are averted.* Take the next sentence—"And they shall never perish." They have a tendency to spiritual sickness, but their Shepherd will doctor them so that they shall never perish. They are sheep, and have a tendency to wander; but their Shepherd shall keep them so that they shall never perish. Time tries them, and they grow old, and the novelty of religion wears off; but they shall never perish. Think what you will of them, "they shall never perish," for so the promise stands.

The first statement, "I give unto them eternal life," is as broad as well can be, and this is broader still—"they shall never perish." The rule has absolutely no exception. The whole of them shall be preserved. Let them live to be as old as Methuselah, they shall never perish, whatever temptation may assail them. They may be tried, and troubled, and broken down, so that they may be hardly able to live; but they shall never perish. "Never" is a long day; but it is not longer than grace will last. Blessed be God, this grand promise stands fast—"They shall never perish."

Now we must go a step farther. We have no time to urge these arguments at any great length. They are safe, next, by *outer injuries being prevented.* "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Many will pluck at them, but none shall pluck them away. The devil will give many a horrible pluck and pull, to get them away; but out of the great Shepherd's hand he shall never take them. Their old companions, and the memory of their old sins will come, and pluck at them very hard, and very cunningly; but the Saviour says, "None shall pluck them out of my hand." So, first, here is their security: *they are in his hand;* that is, in his *possession*, and he grasps them, as a man holds a thing in his hand, and says, "It is mine." Neither shall any take them away from being under his *protection.* Never shall they be plucked away from Christ. When he says this, he pledges his honour to preserve them, for if it could be that one were plucked out of his hand, then would the devils in hell rejoice, and say, "He could not keep them. He said that he would, but he

could not. We have managed to pluck this one, or that one, out of the pierced hand of their Redeemer." But such a horrible exultation shall never be heard throughout the ages of eternity. "They shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

Some one wickedly said, "They may get out of his hand themselves." But how can this be true, when the first sentence is, "They shall never perish"? Treat Scripture honestly and candidly, and you will admit that the promise "they shall never perish" shuts out the idea of perishing by going out of the Lord's hand by their own act and deed. "They shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Who is to loosen the clasp of that hand which was pierced with the nail for me? My Lord Jesus bought me too dearly ever to let me go. He loves me so well that his whole omnipotence will work with that hand, and unless there is something greater than Godhead, I cannot be plucked away from that dear, fast-holding grip.

Now, to make quite sure about it, and to pile on the comfort, the Saviour goes on to add *the care and power of God himself*. Our Lord says, "My Father, which gave them me." The saints of God are safe, because the Father gave them to his Son. He did not give him a transitory inheritance. He did not bestow on him a something which he might, after all, lose. Will the Lord Christ lose what his Father gave him? You know how people say, "Oh, I hope that, if a burglar takes anything from my house, he will not take that cup, which is an heirloom. My father gave it to me." If a man had to defend his property, he would be sure to take care of that which was a very special gift, given in his honour, as a memorial of a great work. So is it with our Lord Jesus: he values that which his Father gave him. I delight in the thought. I picture my blessed Lord looking at each one of his believing people, and saying, "My Father gave you to me." That poor woman, that struggling young man, that decrepit old lady, that man who is half-starved, but who loves his Lord—Jesus says of each one, "My Father gave this soul to me." He cannot lose what his Father gave him. He would die again sooner than he would lose them. His death has made their salvation safe beyond all jeopardy. He laid down his life for the sheep. The lion came, and leaped into the fold; but the Shepherd met the lion; yea, he received him on his naked breast, and held him there. It was a terrible tug. The Shepherd sweat great drops of blood as he held the monster; but he rent him, and he hurled him to the earth, and said, "It is finished:" *and it was finished.* He has so saved all his flock until now that we are sure that he will never lose one of those whom his Father committed to his trust. "My Father gave them me."

Then he goes on to say that *his people are kept by the Father's power*; for he says, "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Beloved, although God gave us to Christ, he did not cease to care for us himself! Our sweet text last Sunday night I must bring to your memory. I could not fully preach from it, but the text was enough without a sermon: "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them." We tried to show you how we were none the less the Father's because we were the Son's, and none the less the

Son's because we belonged to the Father. So here Jesus in effect says. "My Father gave you to me; yet he takes care of you none the less, but all the more. Because he is determined that what he gave to me shall be mine, the Lord will put forth his wisdom and power to preserve you."

Let me by a symbol illustrate the latter words of the text. There lie the children of God in the hand of Christ. Do you see that fast closed hand? They are safe enough there. Jesus says, "No man shall be able to pluck them out of *my hand.*" But see the Father, he puts his hand over the hand of Jesus! There, now: you are inside two hands, "And no man is able to pluck them out of *my Father's hand.*" Oh, the serene security of those who hear the voice of Christ, and whom he calls his sheep! A double-handed force keeps them safe against all ill. Pluck away, Satan! You will never pluck them away from the hand of Jesus, and the hand of his Father! "*Quis separabit?*" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" It is impossible to be done.

And then the Saviour finishes all by saying that, while he has spoken of the Father and himself as two—and two they are as persons—yet *in their divine essence they are but one.* He says, "I and my Father are one;" and especially one in love to his people. "The Father himself loveth you," even as he loves his Son; and, while you read the love of Christ in his death, you must read the Father's love quite as much in that great sacrifice. It is true of our Lord Jesus that—"He loved the church, and gave himself for it;" but it is equally true of the Father—"God so loved the world, that he gave his Only-begotten Son." They are one in an infinite love to all those who, called according to the divine purpose, are following Christ, and hearing his voice. I fall back with great joy upon this blessed conviction—that he will not suffer those to perish who have received eternal life at his hands. Of course, if you have only taken temporary life—if you only believe in that—you will get no more than you believe. Your gift will be measured by your faith. But if you say, "I gave myself up to Christ that he might be Alpha and Omega to me; and I wholly trust myself to him without reserve, throughout all my life, to save me," he will do it; for "I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

You are safe in Christ's hand. Know it, and feel the joy of it. "Oh," says one, "but if I thought so, I should run into sin!" I am sorry for you: things act very strangely upon you. Nothing binds me to my Lord like a strong belief in his changeless love. "Oh, but it would be far safer to tell your hearers that they may be overcome by sin, and perish!" I will not tell them what I do not believe. I will not dishonour my Lord by a falsehood. Shall I come home to your house, and tell your children that, if they do wrong, you will cut their heads off; or that, if they disobey you, they will cease to be your children. If I were to propound that doctrine, your children would grow angry at such a slander upon their father. They would say,

"No, we know better than that!" Far rather would I say to them, "My dear children, your father loves you; he will love you without end, therefore do not grieve him." Under such doctrine true children will say, "We love our ever-loving father. We will not disobey him. We will endeavour to walk in his ways."

"'Tis love that makes our willing feet
In swift obedience move."

Our loving Lord will not cast away those to whom he is bound by marriage-bonds.

"Well, but suppose we sin." He will chasten us, and restore us "If I believed that doctrine, I should live as I like," says one. Then you are not one of his sheep, for his sheep love holiness, and will not love iniquity. The change wrought by the new birth is such that a man will not return to his old ways of sin and folly. This is the doctrine; and how can you make it to be an indulgence to sin? True saints never turn the grace of God into licentiousness, but the very mention of eternal love leads them to careful obedience.

One thing I must say at the end. Some ministers preach a gospel with a very wide door to it, but there is nothing to be had when you get within. I am sometimes told that I make my door a little too narrow. It is not true, for I preach the gospel to every creature under heaven, with all my might; but if the door be narrow, there is something worth having when you enter by it. Even if the way be narrow, if you once get in, you *have* got in, and you have found eternal life, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of Christ's hands. Sinner, come and have an eternal blessing! It is worth having. Come and have it! If thou believest, thou shalt assuredly be saved. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" saved from sin so as never to go back and live in it again; so saved as to be made holy; so saved as to be preserved in holiness. Holiness shall be the set of the main current of thy life, until, made perfectly holy, thou shalt dwell with God above.

Into his hands let us commit our spirits to-night, and we may rest assured that they shall be safe eternally. Amen.

Life Eternal

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"—John x. 28.

SOME will say that this is a mixed congregation, and that such a doctrine as this should not be advanced in the presence of ungodly men and women. This shows how little such objectors read their Bible, for this very text was spoken by the Saviour, not to his loving disciples, but to his enemies. Read the thirty-first verse of the chapter, and you will see the temper of the congregation to whom Jesus Christ preached upon this subject—"Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him." So that an indignant multitude of bigots had this hurled into their face by the Saviour, that although *they* might reject him, and because of their wilful obstinacy might miss the blessings of grace, yet those blessings were rich and rare. He would have them to know that what they lost was inexpressibly precious, and that his message was not to be despised without great damage to their souls. Thus, if there be a mixed multitude here—and I fear the allegation is true, that there are many here who cannot comprehend the preciousness of the things of God—yet, for the same reason which prompted the Saviour to preach of this doctrine to the wicked in his day, we will do the same now, that they may know what it is they lose by losing Christ, what those comfortable things are which they despise, and what are the inestimable treasures which those must miss who seek after the treasures of this world, and let their God, their Saviour go.

We have no time to loiter, and let us therefore, as the bee sucks honey from the flower, seek after the sweet essence of the text, "I give unto them eternal life." The connection tells us that the pronoun "them" refers to Christ's sheep, to certain persons whom he had chosen to be his sheep, and whom he had also called to be such. Lest we should be in the dark as to whom they are, our Saviour has kindly put us in possession of the marks by which his sheep may be discovered. We cannot read the secret roll of election, nor can we search the heart, but we can mark the outward conduct of men, and the verse before the text tells us by what signs we are to know God's people. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." The marks are the

hearing of Christ, and then the following of Christ, first, by faith in him, and then by an active obedience to his precepts. "Faith which worketh by love" is the mark of Christ's sheep, and it is of true believers that he speaks when he says, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Would to God that all of us wore the livery of the elect, namely, active, sanctifying faith! Oh that we all listened to the Great Shepherd's voice, that we received the truth which he delivers! and then resolved by his grace to follow him whithersoever he goeth, as the sheep follow the shepherd.

Having thus explained to whom the text belongs, we will now handle it in a threefold manner. The text implies, first, *somewhat concerning the past of these people;* the text plainly states, in the second place, *a great deal about the present of these people;* and, thirdly, the text not obscurely hints at *something about their future.*

I. In the first place, the studious reader will observe that the text implies SOMEWHAT CONCERNING THE PAST HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

It is said, "I give nnto them eternal life." There is an implication, therefore, *that they had lost eternal life.* Every one of God's people fell in Adam, and all have fallen also by actual sin; consequently, we came under condemnation, and Christ Jesus has done for us what Her Majesty the Queeu has sometimes done for a condemned criminal—he has brought us a free pardon. He has given us life. When our own desert was eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, Jesus Christ stepped in, and he said, "Thou art forgiven; the sentence shall not take place upon thee; thine offence is blotted out; thou art clear." Nay, I think the text implies that there was something more than condemnation, there was execution. We were not only condemned to die, we were already spiritually dead. Jesus did not merely spare the life which onght to have been taken, and in that sense gave it to us, but he imparted to us a life which we had not before enjoyed. It is implied in the text that we were spiritually dead; nay, we are not left here to our own surmisings, nor even to our own experience, for the apostle Paul has said, "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." What, Paul, dead? Are you not mistaken? Perhaps they were only a little sick? Nay, we are ready to admit, O apostle, that they were sick and near to death, but surely they had a little vital energy, a little power to assist themselves! "No," says the apostle, "you were dead, dead in trespasses and sins." The work of salvation is tantamount, not only to the healing of the sick, but to the actual resurrection of a dead man from his grave. All the saints who are now alive unto God were once as dead as others, quite as corrupt and offensive as others, and as much an ill savour in the nostrils of Divine Justice by reason of their sins as even the most corrupt of their fellows. We had altogether gone out of the way; we had altogether become abominable, for "there is none that doeth good, no not one." When we were all shut up under sin then Jesus Christ came into the region of death, and brought life and immortality to us. Life was forfeited by all the saints; spiritual life they had none: Jesus the Quickener has made them alive unto God.

Is it not also very clearly implied that, so far from having any life, *these people could not otherwise have obtained life except by its being*

given to them? It is a rule well known to all Biblical students, that you never meet in God's Word with an unnecessary miracle, that a miracle is never wrought where the ordinary course of nature would suffice. Now, my brethren, the greatest of all miracles is the salvation of a soul. If that soul could save itself God would not save it, but would let it do what it could do; and if the spiritually dead could quicken themselves, rest assured, from the analogy of all the divine transactions, that Jesus Christ would not have come to give them life. I believe that it would be utterly impossible for any one of us to enter heaven, let us do what we might, unless Jesus Christ had come from heaven to show us the way, to remove the bolts and bars for us, and to enable us to tread in the path which leads to glory and immortality. Lost! lost! lost! The race of man was utterly lost, not partly lost, not thrown into a condition in which it might be ruined unless it worked hard to save itself; but so lost, that but for the interposition of a divine arm, but for the appearance of God in human flesh, but for the stupendous transaction upon Calvary, and the work of God the Holy Ghost in the heart, not one dead soul ever could come to life. Eternal life would not be the peculiar work of the Lord Jesus if man had a finger in it, but now man's power is excluded and grace reigns.

It is clearly to be seen in the text, by a little thought, *that eternal life was not the merit of any one of God's people, for it is said that it is given to us.* Now, a gift is the very opposite of payment. What a man receives as a gift he certainly does not deserve. If it be given to us, then it is no more a debt, but if it be a debt then it can be no more a gift. None of us merits eternal life, or ever can merit it. Mere mortal life is a gift of divine mercy, we do not deserve it; and as for the eternal life spoken of in the text, it is a boon too high for the fingers of human merit to hope to reach it; if a man should work never so hard after it, yet upon the footing of the law it would be impossible for him to obtain it. Man merits nothing but death, and life must be the free gift of God. "The wages of sin is death;" that is to say it is earned and procured as matter of debt; "but the gift of God," the free-grace gift of God, "is eternal life." Now, this is a very humiliating doctrine, I know, but it is true, and I want you all to feel it Children of God, I know you do. You see the hole of the pit whence *you* were drawn? Do you see it? Or have you grown proud of late? Those fine feelings and prayings of yours have you stuck them like feathers in your cap? I pray you recollect what you were! *You* be proud! do not forget the dunghill where you once grew! Remember the filth out of which God took you, and instead of being scarlet with the garments of pride, your cheeks may well be scarlet with a blush! Oh! may God forbid, once for all, that we should glory, for what have we to glory in? What have we that we have not received?

It is clear, too, from the text, that *those who are now righteous would have perished but for Christ.* Christ says, "they shall never perish." Promises are never given as superfluities. There is a necessity, therefore, for this promise. There was a danger, a solemn danger, that every one of those men who are now saved would have perished eternally. Sin made them heirs of wrath even as others, so Scripture tells us; and justice must have overwhelmed them with the rest if

distinguishing grace had not prevented. Even now it is solemnly true, that there is no reason why a truly righteous soul should not perish, except that Christ still prevents it. You are alive, but you would not be spiritually alive an hour, unless the Holy Spirit continued to pour his vital energy into your soul. You shall be preserved, but, mark you, it is stated as a promise, and therefore it is not at all a matter of natural necessity. Apart from grace you are in fearful danger of apostacy, and probably you have fears about it even now; like the apostle, who feared lest after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway; a very proper fear, a fear which will often come upon sincere souls, who feel a holy jealousy of themselves. But we need have no fear when we come to the promise of God, for if we are really in Christ we have a guarantee of security, since Christ's own word is, "They shall never perish." The promise was certainly given because it was wanted. There is a danger of perishing; there are ten thousand risks of perishing; only Omnipotence itself keeps off the fiery darts of Satan; the blessed Physician gives the antidote or the poison would soon destroy us; he who swears to bring us safely home protects us from a thousand foes, who otherwise would work our ill. "They shall never perish."

It is also implied, *that naturally the people of God have ten thousand enemies who would pluck them out of Christ's hand.* They were once in the hand of the enemy; they were once willing bond-slaves of Satan. All this they know, and all this they are willing to acknowledge. I would to God that some here would feel the truth of that which I have been saying. You self-righteous ones will say, "I am all right; I do my best, I go to a place of worship." Now, soul, that is right enough in itself, but if thou boastest of it, it is an evidence that thou knowest neither God nor thyself. When I have heard of some who have boasted that they felt no inbred sin, I have wished that they would read the story of the Pharisee and the Publican. At the Fulton Street Prayer Meeting, a brother asked for the prayers of believers, because he felt so much the corruption of his own heart, the temptations of Satan, and especially the natural vileness of his own nature. A brother stood up on the opposite side of the hall, and said he thanked God that was not his experience; he did not feel any corruption, and his heart was not depraved. The other one made no reply, but a friend present read these words: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." A sense of sin is a blessed sign either of pardon received, or of pardon to come. He that says he has no sin makes God a liar, and the truth is not in him. He who will not confess his sin shall never be absolved; but he who with a broken and a trembling heart goes to the foot of the cross shall find forgiveness there. This much, then, upon the past estate of the heirs of heaven.

II. And now, to plunge at once into the subject. THE TEXT SHEDS A FLOOD OF LIGHT UPON THE PRESENT STATE OF EVERY BELIEVER.

We shall have to give you hints rather than a long exposition; so kindly take the first sentence, which speaks of *a gift received.* "I give unto them eternal life." This gift is, first of all, *life.* You will make strange confusion of God's Word if you confound life with existence, for they are very different things. All men will exist for ever, but many will dwell in everlasting death; they will know nothing whatever of life. Life is a distinct thing altogether from existence, and implies in God's Word something of activity and of happiness. In the text before us it includes many things. Note the difference between the stone and the plant. The plant has vegetable life. You know the difference between the animal and the plant. While the plant has vegetable life, yet it is altogether dead in the sense in which we speak of living creatures. It has not the sensations which belong to animal life. Then, again, if we turn to another and higher grade, namely, mental life, an animal is dead so far as that is concerned. It cannot enter at all into the mysterious calculations of the mathematician, nor revel in the sublime glories of poetry. The animal has nothing to do with the life of the intellectual mind; as to mental life it is dead. Now, there is a grade of life which is higher than the mental life—a higher life quite unknown to the philosopher, not put down in Plato, nor spoken of by Aristotle, but understood by the very meanest of the children of God. It is a phase of life called "spiritual life," a new form of life altogether, which does not belong to man naturally, but is given to him by Jesus Christ. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul, and all his descendants are made like unto him. The second Adam is made a quickening spirit, and until we are made like the second Adam we know nothing of spiritual life. This body of ours is by nature adapted for a soulish life. The apostle tells us, in that wonderful chapter in Corinthians, that the body is sown—what? "A natural body." The Greek is, "A soulish body"—"but it is raised"—what? "A spiritual body." There is a soulish body, and there is a spiritual body. There is a body adapted to the lower life which belongs to all men, a mere mental existence; and there is to be a body which will belong to all those who have received spiritual life, who shall dwell in that body as the house of their perfected spirit in heaven. The life which Jesus Christ gives his people is spiritual life, therefore it is *mysterious.* "Thou hearest the sound thereof, but thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." You who have mental life cannot explain to the horse or the dog what it is, neither can we who have spiritual life explain to those who have it not what it is. You can tell them what it does and what its effects are, but what the "spark of heavenly flame" may be you yourselves do not know, though you are conscious that it is there.

It is spiritual life which Jesus Christ gives his people, but it is more; it is *divine life.* This life is like the life of God, and therefore it is *elevating.* "We are made," says the apostle, "partakers of the divine nature." "Begotten again by God the Father, not," says the apostle, "with corruptible seed, but with incorruptible." We do not become divine, but we receive a nature which enables us to sympathize with

Deity, to delight in the topics which engage the Eternal Mind, and to live upon the same principles as the Most Holy God. We love, for God is love. We begin to be holy, for God is thrice holy. We pant after perfection, for he is perfect. We delight in doing good, for God is good. We get into a new atmosphere. We pass out of the old range of the mere mental faculties; our spiritual faculties make us akin to God. "Let us," said he, "make man in our own image, after our own likeness." That image Adam lost; that image Christ restores, and gives to us that life which Adam lost in the day when he sinned, when God said to him, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." In that sense he *did* die; the sentence was not postponed; he died spiritually directly he touched the fruit; and this long-lost life Jesus Christ restores to every soul who believes in him.

This life, you will gather from my remarks, is *heavenly life*. It is the same life that expands and develops itself in heaven. The Christian does not die. What does the Saviour say? "He that believeth in me shall never die." Does not the mental life die? Yes. Does not the mere bodily life die? Ay, but not the spiritual life. It is the same life here which it will be there, only now it is undeveloped and corruption impedes its action. Brethren, nothing of us shall go to heaven as flesh and blood, but only as it is subdued, elevated, changed, and perfected by the influence of the spirit-life. Know ye not that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." Then what is the "I," the "myself" that shall enter heaven? Why, if you be in Christ a new creature, then that new creature and nothing but that new creature, the very life which you have lived here in this tabernacle, the very life that has budded and blossomed in the garden of communion with God, that life which has led you to visit the sick, and clothe the naked, and feed the hungry, that life which has made tears of repentance stream down your cheeks, that life which has caused you to believe in Jesus,—this is the life which will go to heaven; and if you have not this, then you do not possess the life of heaven, and dead souls cannot enter there. Only living men can enter into the land of the living. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly." Even now the heavenly life heaves and throbs within us.

I think it may also be inferred from all this that the life which Christ gives his people is *an energetic life*. If the spiritual life is poured into a man it raises him above his former state, and lifts him out of the range of merely carnal comprehension. He himself is discerned of no man. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." You cannot expect the world to understand this new life. It is a hidden thing. It will be a mystery to yourselves, a wonder to your own hearts. But oh! how active it will be! It will fight with your sins, and will not be satisfied until it has slain them. If you tell me you never have a conflict within, I tell you I cannot understand how you can have the divine life, for it is sure to come into conflict at once with the old nature, and there will be perpetual strife. The man becomes a new man at home; his wife and family observe it; he is a different man in business; he is a changed man altogether, whether you view him in connection with his fellow-men or

with his God. He is a new creature. He feels that the new and wondrous life which has been planted in him has made him of a different race from the common herd, and he walks amongst the sons of men feeling that he is an alien and a stranger. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

I wish there were more time to describe the inward life, but this must suffice to indicate the blessing which Jesus gives to the believer by the work of the Holy Ghost.

There is a word in the text which qualifies it: "I give unto them *eternal* life." "Eternal" means "without end." If Christ puts the life of God into a man that life cannot be taken away. It cannot die, that were impossible. When I have heard one say that you may be a child of God to-day but that next week may find you a child of the devil, I have supposed that the word "eternal" according to him could only have meant five or six days; but according to the dictionary I use, according to the mind of the Spirit, "eternal" means "without end." If, then, a man says, "I had spiritual life once, but I do not possess it now," it is clear that either he is mistaken altogether or he never had it at all. If Jesus had said, "I give unto them life which shall last for seven years, but which may perhaps be quenched and put out under temptation," I could understand a man saying that he had fallen from grace; but if it be "eternal life," then it must be "eternal;" there is no end to it, it must go on. The mere existence of the soul we believe will be never-ending, but it will be no boon to the ungodly that it will be so. It is not for Christ to give us mere immortality of existence, for that will be a fearful curse to some men. Lost souls would be glad enough if they could be rid of their immortal existence, but Christ gives an eternal, a holy life, a happy *life*, which is infinitely more than existence. Existence may be a curse, but life is a blessing. This life begins here: "I give unto them." Not, "I shall give," but "I give." Not, "I will give it to them when they die," but "I give it them here, I give unto them eternal life." Now, my hearer, you have either got eternal life to-night, or you are still in death. If you have not received it you are "dead in trespasses and sins," and your doom will be a terrible one; but if God has given you eternal life, fear not the surrounding hosts of hell nor the temptations of the world, for the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath you are the everlasting arms.

This life *is given as a free gift* to every one of the Lord's people, and is bestowed by the Lord and by none else.

2. Let us turn now to the second part of the blessing. Here is *preservation secured.* "They shall never perish." Certain gentlemen who cannot endure the doctrine of final perseverance manage to slip away from the next sentence, "Neither shall any pluck them out of my hands," and suggest, "but they may get out themselves." No, no, no, because the text says, "They shall never perish." Our present sentence which we have now in hand puts aside all suppositions of every kind about the destruction of one of Christ's sheep. "They shall never perish." Take each word. "*They* shall never perish." Some of their notions may, some of their comforts may, some of their expe-

riences may, but THEY never shall. That which is the essence of the man, his true soul, his inward renewed nature, shall never be destroyed. See, then, Christian, you may be deprived of a thousand things without any violation of the promise. The promise is not that the ship shall not go to the bottom, but that the passengers shall get to the shore. The promise is not that the house shall not be burned; the pledge is that you who are in the house shall escape. "*They* shall never perish." Take another word: "They shall never *perish*." They shall go very near it, perhaps. They shall lose their joys and their comforts, but "they shall never *perish*." The life in them shall never be starved out, nor beaten out, nor driven out. If you once get leaven into a piece of bread you cannot get it out; you may boil it, you may fry it, you may bake it, you may do what you like with it, but the leaven is in it, and you cannot get it out. Get the soul saturated with the grace of God, and you can never eradicate it. The man himself shall never perish. He may think he shall, the devil may tell him he shall, his comforts may be withdrawn, he may go to his death-bed full of doubts and fears about himself, but he shall never *perish*. Now, this is either true or it is not. You who think it is not true tell the Lord so; but I believe that it is a most sure and infallible fact, for Jehovah says it. I do not know how it is that they do not perish, it is a wondrous thing; but then it is all a marvel throughout from first to last. Now take the word "*never*." We have shown how long the preservation endures: "They shall *never* perish." "Well, but if they should live to be very aged, and should then fall into sin?" "They shall *never* perish." Oh! but perhaps they may be assaulted in quarters where they least expect it, or they may be beleaguered by temptation." They shall *never* perish." "Well, but a man may be a child of God and yet go to hell." How so, if he can *never* perish? Why, that "never" includes time and eternity, it includes living and dying, it includes the mount and the valley, the tempest and the calm. "They shall *never* perish."

"In every state secure,
Kept by the eternal Hand."

Beneath the wings of the Almighty God night with its pestilence cannot smite them, and day with its cares cannot destroy them; youth with its passions shall be safely passed; middle age with all its whirl of business shall be navigated in safety; old age with its infirmities shall become the land of Beulah; death's gloomy vale shall be lit up with the coming splendour; the actual moment of departure, the last and solemn article shall be the passing over of a river dryshod. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee, saith the Lord." "They shall *never* perish."

There is a way of explaining away everything, I suppose, but I really do not know how the opponents of the perseverance of God's saints will get over this text. They may do with it as they will, but I shall still believe what I find here, that I shall never perish if I am one of Christ's people. If I perish, then Christ will not have kept his promise; but I know he must abide faithful to his word. "He is not a

man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent." Every soul that resteth on the atoning sacrifice is safe, and safe for ever; "they shall *never* perish."

3. Then comes the third sentence, in which we have *a position guaranteed—"in Christ's hand."* We have not time to expound it: it is to be in a place of honour; we are the ring he wears on his finger. It is a place of love: "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." It is a place of power: his right hand encloses all his people. It is a place of property: Christ holds his people; "all the saints are in thy hand." It is a place of discretion: we are yielded up to Christ, and Christ wields a discretionary government over us. It is a place of guidance, a place of protection: as sheep are said to be in the hand of the shepherd, so are we in the hand of Christ. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, to be used by him, as jewels in the hands of the bride to be her ornament, so are we in the hand of Christ. Now, what says the text? It reminds us that there are some who want to pluck us thence. There are those who, with false doctrine, would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect. There are roaring persecutors who would frighten God's saints, and so make them turn back in the day of battle. There are scheming tempters—the panderers to hell, the jackals of the lion of the pit, who would fain drag us to destruction. Then there are our own hearts that would pluck us thence. You know in the text before us we need not read the word "*man*," for it is not in the original. The translators have put the word "man" in italics to show that it is not in the Greek, and so we may read it—"Neither shall *any* pluck them out of my hand." Not only—any "man," but any *devil* either. Nothing that is present shall do it, nothing to come; no principality, no power, nothing whatsoever that is conceivable. "None shall pluck them out of my hand." It does not merely include men, who are sometimes our worst foes, for the worst that we have are they of our own household; it also includes fallen spirits; but none shall be able to pluck us out of his hand. By no possibility shall any be able, by any of their schemes, to remove us from being his favourites, his property, his dear sons, his protected children. Oh, what a blessed promise!

Now, do you know, while I have been preaching to you about this, I have been thinking a little about my own history before I knew the Lord. One of the things that made me want to be a Christian was this. I had seen some young lads that I was at school with, they were excellent lads, and some of them had been held up as patterns of imitation to me and to others. I saw them, though only a very few years older than myself, turn out as vain and ungodly as well could be, and yet I knew them to have been excellently well disposed as boys, nay, to have been very patterns; and this kind of thought used to cross my young brain, "Is there not some means of being preserved from making a shipwreck of my life?" When I came to read the Bible, it seemed to me to be full of this doctrine: "If you trust Christ, he will save you from all evil; he will keep you in a life of integrity and holiness while here, and he will bring you safe to heaven at the last." I felt that I could not trust man, for I had seen some of the very best wandering far from truth; if I trusted Christ, it was

not a chance as to whether I should get to heaven, but a certainty; and I learned that if I rested all my weight upon him he would keep me, for I found it written, "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." I found the apostle saying, "I am persuaded that he that hath begun a good work in you will carry it on," and such-like expressions. "Why," I reasoned, "I have found an insurance office, and a good one too; I will insure my life in it; I will go to Jesus as I am, for he bids me; I will trust myself with him." If I had listened to the Arminian theory I should never have been converted, for it never had any charms for me. A Saviour who casts away his people, a God who leaves his children to perish, were not worthy of my worship, and a salvation which does not save outright is neither worth preaching nor listening to. When I stand here and say to this assembled mass, Trust my Master, believe him, and it is no matter of question as to whether you shall be saved, for he has said that "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" when I say that, I feel that I have something to say which is worth listening to. My dear hearer, with a new heart and a right spirit you will be a new man. As you now are, if you were to be pardoned to-night you would be condemned to-morrow, for the tendencies of your nature would lead you astray. But if God shall put a new nature into you, your old nature shall not be able to control it. The new immortal principle shall get the mastery; you shall be kept from sinning; you shall be preserved in holiness, and though you will have to mourn over your imperfection, yet you will feel that you have God's own life in you; though you will realize that you are not perfect, yet you will wish you were, and this wishing to be so will be a sign of grace in your soul, and these wishes and desires will go on waxing stronger and stronger, till, having mastered sin by the power of the Spirit, the day shall come when this body shall be dropped off, and the new life, disencumbered of the vile rags which it was compelled to wear while it was here, shall leap in its disembodied existence into perfection, and then shall wait for the trumpet's sound, and the body itself, purified and made fit for the new and higher life, shall be again inhabited, and so both the body and the soul, delivered from all sin, shall be an everlasting testimony to the promise of Christ, for those who rest in him shall have eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand.

III. I have anticipated the last point, as to THE OUTLOOK OF MY TEXT INTO THE FUTURE.

If God has given you eternal life, that comprehends all the future. Your spiritual existence will flourish when empires and kingdoms decay. Your life will live on when the heart of this great world shall grow cold, when the pulse of the great sea shall cease to

beat, when the eye of the bright sun shall grow dim with age. You possess *eternal* life. When, like a moment's foam which melts into the wave that bears it, the whole universe shall have gone, and left not a wreck behind, it shall be well with *you*, for you have eternal life. You have an existence that will run parallel with the existence of the Deity. Eternal life! Oh! what an avenue of glory is opened by those words—Eternal Life! "Because I live," saith Christ, "ye shall live also." As long as there is a Christ there shall be a happy soul, and you shall be that happy soul. As long as there is a God there shall be a beatified existence, and you shall enjoy existence, for Jesus gives you eternal life. Spin on, old world, until thine axle is worn out. Fly on, Old Father Time, until thine hour-glass is broken, and thou shalt cease to be! Come, mighty angel! plant thy foot upon the sea and upon the land, and swear by him that liveth that time shall be no more, for even then every Christian shall still live, because Christ gives unto them eternal life.

Does not the next sentence also look into the future?—"They shall never perish." They shall never cease to exist in perpetual blessedness! never cease to be like God in their natures; never. Think you have been in heaven a thousand years—can you realize it? A thousand years' blessed communion with the Lord Jesus! A thousand years in his bosom! A thousand years with the sight of him to ravish your spirit! Well, but you will have just as long to be there as if you had never begun, for you shall never, never perish. When the millennium shall come, or when the judgment shall sit, and when all the great transactions of prophecy shall be fulfilled, these need not distress you, for if you trust Christ you shall never—oh! turn that word over—you shall never, never, never, *never*, NEVER perish! What an eternity of glory, what unspeakable delight is wrapped up in this promise—"They shall never perish!"

Then, surely, this is another glance into the future—"And none shall pluck them out of my hand." We shall be in his hand for ever, we shall be in his heart for ever, we shall be in his very self for ever—one with him, and none shall pluck us thence. Happy, happy is the man who can lay claim to such a promise as this!

Oh! there are some of you to whom I wish this promise belonged! It is very rich, and very full of comfort; I wish it belonged to you. Dost thou say, "I wish it belonged to me"? Oh! friend, I am glad to hear thee say that! Dost thou know, soul, that there is but one key to open this precious treasure, and that is the key of the cross of the Lord Jesus? What sayest thou? Canst thou trust him? When one told me the other day she could not trust Christ, I looked her in the face and said, "What has he done that you should not trust him? Can you trust *me*?" "Yes," she said, "I can trust my fellow-creatures, but I

cannot trust God." Oh! I thought, what terrible blasphemy! It was honestly spoken, and it was spoken by one who did not perceive the greatness of the offence in it, but I do not know that there is any worse thing that can be said than that—"I cannot trust God!" Well, sir, you have made him a liar then! That is the practical result of it; for if you believe a man to be honest you can always trust him. Can I trust my fellow-man, and not trust God? Oh! the horror of that thought! There is such an amonnt of blasphemy in it that I must not quote it again! Not trust Christ! "Well," says one, "but may we not have a merely natural trust and so be deceived?" I do not know of any trust in Christ except a spiritnal one, nor do I believe in any. If thou trustest Christ thou hast not done that of thyself. There was never a soul that did trust Christ unless he was enabled to do it by God the Holy Spirit, and if you wholly and simply trust Christ you need not ask any questions about natural trusting or spiritual trusting. If you trust the Lord Jesus wholly you are right. Rest on him then; rest on him only, wholly, and solely, and if you perish then I do not understand the gospel, and I cannot comprehend what the Bible means. I will tell you one thing, and then close. If you trust Christ and you perish, then I must perish most certainly, and so must all my brethren and sisters here who have believed in Jesus. It is all over with us if it is all over with you. When there is a storm, one passenger cannot very well go to the bottom, if he is in the ship, unless the whole of the ship's company go too. We must go together. We have got into the life-boat, and if the life-boat goes down with you it must go down with all the saints, and all the apostles, and all the martyrs too. They went to heaven resting upon Christ, and if you rest on Christ you will get there also.

Oh! sinner, mayest thou be led to-day to rest on Jesus and on Jesus only, and then take the text. Do not be afraid of it—"I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand."

A Sharp Knife for the Vine Branches

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."—John xv. 2.

THESE are *the words of Jesus.* Unto you that believe he is precious; and every word that he speaks is precious for his sake: you will be sure, then, to give every syllable its weight, and to let each word fall upon your soul as coming directly from his lips. These are the words of our *Lord Jesus* just before his departure *from the world.* We reckon the words of dying men to be worth storing, and especially of such a matchless man as our Lord and Master. It may be said of him, "Thou hast kept the best wine until now;" for, in this chapter, and in that which follows, we have some of the choicest, deepest, and richest words that the Master ever uttered. You will endeavour then, to hear him speaking as upon the verge of Gethsemane; you will listen to these sentences as coming to you associated with the groans and bloody sweat of his agony. *These are words, moreover, about us,* and, therefore, to be received by us with profound attention; the most of us who are here are in Christ, some one way or another; the majority of us profess to be Christians; the text, then, is directed to us. When Jesus speaks about anything, it is weighty, and demands our ear, but when he speaks about ourselves to ourselves, we must give him the heart as well as the ear, and give most earnest heed to the things which he speaks to us, lest by any means we let them slip. We may have to regret one day that we did not listen to his voice in love, for we may have to hear it when we *must* listen to it, when the tones have become those of judgment, and Jesus the judge shall say unto us, "I know you not," even though we shall venture to plead that we ate and drank in his presence, and that he taught in our streets.

Having, then, your solemn attention, we will read the text again: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

The text *suggests self-examination; conveys instruction;* and, *invites meditation.*

I. In the first place, it SUGGESTS SELF-EXAMINATION.

I hear in these solemn words the tones of his voice of whom Malachi said, "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap."

I discern in these two heart-searching sentences, the voice of him of whom John said, "His fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Truly the Lord's "fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem." Happy shall that man be who can bear to be thrust into the flame, and to be covered with the hot coals of the burning truths here taught: but he shall be found reprobate who cannot bear the trial.

1. Observe, that our text mentions *two characters who are in some respects exceedingly alike;* they are both branches, they are both branches in the vine: "Every branch in *me*." How much alike persons may be apparently, who in God's sight stand at opposite poles of character! Both the persons described in the text were in Christ: in Christ in different senses it is plain, because the first persons were not so in Christ as to bring forth fruit, consequently, as fruit is that by which we are to judge a man, they were not in Christ effectually, graciously, influentially, or so as to receive the fruit-creating sap. If they had brought forth fruit, their fruitfulness would have been a sign that they were in Christ savingly. Who will venture to say that a man who yields no fruit of righteousness can be really a Christian? Yet they were in Christ in some sense or other; that is to say, the two characters were equally esteemed to be Christians; their names were enrolled in the same church register; in the common judgment of men they were equally Christian; according to their own profession, they were so; in many other respects which we need not now catalogue, they were both in Christ as his avowed disciples, as soldiers professedly fighting under his banner, as servants wearing his livery.

These two persons were probably equally sound in their doctrinal views, they held the same precious truth. If they heard falsehood, they were equally earnest to denounce it. When they listened to the gospel, they received it with joy, and so received it as to be willing to assist in the spread of it, and even to make sacrifices for its extension. These persons were equally attentive to ordinances. How often has it happened that two persons of widely different state before the Lord, have been baptised at the same hour, in the same water, into the same name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and have then broken bread together with equal apparent fervency, and with equal professions of enjoyment and devotion! These people have been equally fair in their profession; their moral conduct has in the judgment of all onlookers been much the same; they have avoided every thing of ill repute, and they have in their measure sought after that which was comely and lovely in the estimation of men. Ah! there will often be found two who publicly pray alike, have an equal gift in prayer—and what is worse, preach with equal earnestness and zeal, to all appearance, who have family prayer maintained with the same consistency, and yet for all this, the end of the one shall be to be cast away as a branch to be burned, while the end of the other shall be to bring forth fruit unto perfection, with everlasting life as the reward. Ah! friends, man can counterfeit cleverly, but when the devil helps him, he becomes master of the art. You will see pieces of coinage which it is almost impossible for you to discover to be mere counterfeits

by their appearance, or even by their ring; in the scales they almost deceive you, but you put them into the fire, and then the discovery is made. Doubtless there are thousands in all Christian churches who have the stamp and the impress of the King upon them, and look like the genuine shekels of the sanctuary, who after all are only fit to be like bad money, fastened down on the footstool of the judgment seat, with a nail driven through them, to their everlasting reprobation and disgrace. How can we tell a bold man from a coward? Two soldiers wear the same regimentals: they will talk equally loudly of what they will do when the enemy shall come. It is the battle that tests and proves them; some peculiar phase of the conflict will bring out the difference; but till the battle comes, how easy it is for the poltroon to play the hero, while perhaps the bravest man may modestly shrink into the rear! Our text, then, brings before us two characters apparently alike.

2. Then, in the second place, *it shows us the distinction between them*—the great and solemn difference. The first branch brought forth no fruit; the second branch bore some fruit. "By their fruits ye shall know them." We have no right to judge of our neighbours' motives and thoughts, except so far as they may be clearly discoverable by their actions and words. The interior we must leave with God, but the exterior we may judge, and must judge. There is a sense in which we are not to judge men; but there is another sense in which he would be an arrant fool who did not constantly exercise his judgment upon men. "By their fruits ye shall know them," is our Lord's own canon of sacred criticism. If you would judge men and judge yourselves, this is the one test—"by their fruits."

Now, then, what say you professors who are present here to-day; you who are so regular in your attendance upon the means of grace? Will you now search yourselves, to see whether you have any fruit? That you may be helped in such an investigation, let me remind you that the apostle Paul has given us a list of these fruits, in his fifth chapter of the epistle to the Galatians. He says in the twenty-second verse, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Nine kinds of fruit: all these should be "in us and abound." Let us question ourselves whether we have any of them.

Say, professor, hast thou brought forth the fruit of "*love*"? Searching question, this! I do not ask thee, canst thou talk of love? but, dost thou feel it? I do not say, is love upon your tongue? but, does love rule thy heart? Dost thou love God as a child loves its father? Dost thou love the Saviour from a sense of gratitude to him who bought thee with his blood? Dost thou feel the love of the gracious Comforter, who dwells in thee, if thou be indeed a child of God? What knowest thou about love to the brethren? Dost thou love the saints, as saints, whether they belong to thy church or no; whether they please thee or serve thy turn or no? Say, dost thou love God's poor? Dost thou love God's persecuted and despised ones? Answer, I pray thee. What about love to the kingdom of the Lord's dear Son, and to the souls of men? Canst thou sit still and be satisfied with being saved thyself, while thy neighbours are being damned by thousands? Are thine eyes never wet with tears for impenitent souls? Do the terrors of the Lord

never get hold upon thee, when thou thinkest of men plunging themselves into perdition? "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" Hast thou this fruit, then? for if not, "every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."

Next comes *joy*. Does thy religion ever give thee joy? Is it mere matter of duty, a heavy chain for thee to drag about like a convict, or is thy religion a harp for thee to dance to the tune of? Dost thou ever rejoice in Jesus Christ? Dost thou know what the "joy of the Lord" means? Does it ever give thee joy to think that he is the same even when the fig tree does not blossom, and the herd is cut off from the stall? Dost thou feel a joy in reading the promises of God's word? Hast thou a joy in secret prayer; that joy which the world never gave thee, and cannot take away from thee? Hast thou a secret joy, like a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, which is only open to thee and thy Lord, because thy fellowship is with him, and not with the sons of sin? He that never mourned because of sin, has never repented; but he who has never rejoiced because of forgiveness, cannot have seen the cross. Come, then, hast thou produced this fruit of joy? The Lord give it more and more to thee! If thou hast never had it, then hear the sentence—"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."

Next follows "peace." Oh, blessed fruit! an autumn fruit, mellow and sweet, and fit for an angel's tooth. It is the fruit the blessed feed upon in heaven—peace with God, peace of conscience, peace with one's fellow men, "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," which "keeps the heart and mind through Jesus Christ." "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Ah! my hearers, some of you make a great deal of noise perhaps about religion, and yet never have peace of conscience. This is what ceremonialists never can obtain. "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" of outward ordinances, and carnal, vainglorious, pompous ceremonies. Of our altar, where the finished sacrifice is eaten as a peace offering, they cannot eat. They find no peace after all their masses, and holy offices, and processions, and sacred hours, and priestcraft, and I know not what; poor slaves, they go down to their graves as much in bondage as ever, with the dreary prospect of a purgatorial fire before them: no delightful prospect of waking up in the likeness of Christ; no sense of the truth of that glorious passage, "and ye are complete in him." He that hath Christ hath this one of his fruits, namely, peace. He who knows no peace with God, has good need to tremble.

Mention is next made of *longsuffering*. I fear there are many professors who have very little of this, a quality which may be viewed in many aspects. There is patience, which bears God's chastising hand, and does not turn against him, but says, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Longsuffering towards God, suffering long. Then there is longsuffering towards man, bearing persecution without apostacy, bearing slander and reproach without revenge, bearing the errors and mistakes of mankind with tender

compassion. The believer should have much of this. Some of us, perhaps, may be naturally quick tempered; grace must overcome angry passions. It is not for you to say, "I cannot help it;" the fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering—you must help it. If there is no change in your temper, there is no change in you at all; you have need to be converted. If the grace of God does not help you in a measure to keep under that temper which will be there, but which you must restrain, you have need to go to God and ask him to make sound work in you, for there is no work of grace there yet. We must have longsuffering, or we may be found fruitless, and then woe unto us.

Next in order is *gentleness*, by which I understand kindness. The Christian is a man of kindness. He recognises his kinnedness with his fellow men, he wishes to treat them as his kin. He has compassion for those who are suffering; he endeavours to make his manners kind and courteous. He knows that there is a natural offence in the cross to carnal men, he does not wish therefore to make any offence of his own. He desires in his own life not to be morose, suspicious, harsh, proud domineering, but he seeks to imitate his Master, who said of himself, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." The believer in Christ should be gentle towards all men with whom he comes in contact. This is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and, I may add, a fruit of the Spirit in which many professors are terribly deficient. Do not think that I judge you. I judge you not—there is one that judgeth you, it is this word of God which we speak. Gentleness is the fruit of the Spirit, and if you have it not, you have not this fruit of the Spirit; and what saith the text, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away!"

We are next reminded of *goodness*, by which is undoubtedly meant beneficence, benevolence, generosity, not merely kindliness of manner, but bounty of heart. Oh, what a fine thing it is when our Christianity gives us a noble spirit! We cannot all be nobles in pocket, but every child of God should be a noble in his heart. "Come in," said a poor Scotch woman to some of the Lord's people, "I have room for ten of you in my house, but I have room for ten thousand of you in my heart." So should the believer say, "Come in, ye that are in need; I have not the power to help many of you, but I have the will to help all of you if I could." The Christian should be like his Lord and Master, easily entreated, ready to communicate, making it his delight and his business to distribute, like a cloud that is full of rain, and empties itself upon the earth; like the bright and sparkling sun scattering his beams abroad, and not hiding or hoarding his light. If ye have not this fruit of the Spirit in some measure, I beseech you to remember the solemn words of the text, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."

Then comes *faith*, by which is probably not meant the grace of faith which is rather a root than a fruit, yet that is included. The fruit of the Spirit is indeed faith in God; without this, there is not even the commencement of anything like security in the soul. Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Hast thou faith? If thou hast faith but as a grain of mustard-seed, it is a sign of life within thee. If thou hast little of it, pray, "Lord, increase our faith!" But the faith here, I think, means

faithfulness—faithfulness towards God, faithfulness towards conscience. How little some Christians make of that nowadays! Why, they swallow their consciences. There are ministers who subscribe to words which they know to be deceiving the people, and help to buttress a church which is doing its utmost to lead this nation into downright Popery. The good and gracious ministers in the Establishment are the prop and pillar of it, and by their influence they maintain a system which enables traitors to pollute this land with Popery. O that our friends had a little more tenderness of conscience, and would come out from their unhallowed alliance with the Popish Ritualists. How earnestly do I pray that none of us have the remotest connection with anything which would take us back to that Antichrist which God hateth, which he so hateth, that he has bidden his servant John, call the apostate church by a dreadful name, a brand of infamy, a name which God never uses till he has cast off and utterly abhorred a thing. My brethren, may your consciences be faithful, and may you be faithful to your consciences: men that trifle with doctrine, it seems to me, little know what sins they commit. I tell you who trifle with doctrines, that you are as bad as thieves; you are worse, for the thief only robs men, but you rob God and your own souls. By helping to foster error, you are heaping together the elements of a pestilence which, unless grace prevent, will utterly destroy this land. We must have faithfulness also in our dealings with our fellow men in business. Saints are men of honour still. The Christian man "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." He does not take an oath, but his word is his bond. O that we may have this fruit of the Spirit: faithfulness, directness, straightforwardness, doing the right, loving the true, and walking uprightly before the Lord our God!

The next fruit is *meekness*. May we possess much of this, for there is a peculiar benediction promised to the meek: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." The Christian is to be as harmless as a dove. In his Master's battles, bold as a lion, but for himself and for his own cause, tender, gentle, shunning debate, loving quietness, ready to take a rebuke rather than to administer one; feeling himself to be weak and frail. Moses was the meekest of men, often provoked, but only once speaking unadvisedly with his lips. It is marvellous how he bore with the people; they were the most provoking people in the world, except ourselves—but yet, like as a nurse is tender with a sick child, even so was he with a foolish people. How oft did they provoke him and grieve his spirit! He grew indignant, and dashed the two tables of stone upon the ground, when he saw the idolatry of the people. Moses, the meekest of men, could not bear that; and God's meekest servants grow wrath when they think of the idolatry into which this land is sliding so rapidly. But meek we must be towards all men; and if we have not this fruit, the Master says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away."

Do not forget *temperance*, which is now generally used in respect to meats and drinks, but which has a far wider signification, though it includes that. The man who indulges the appetites of the flesh, and cannot control himself as to eating and drinking, need not pretend to be a Christian. He has first to prove that he is equal to a beast

before he may pretend to be a child of God; he has first to show that he is a man before he may claim to be a Christian. Those who indulge in drunkenness shall drink of the wine of God's wrath ere long, and then how bitter will their sweet wines be to them! how will that which has been sweet to the throat, be as poison in the bowels for ever and ever! If we have not that kind of temperance, evidently we can know nothing about true religion. But there must be an equal temperance in all other things, a temperance in your dress, in your expenditure, in your temper, and indeed in every act. There is a moderation to be observed, a narrow road to be followed, which the tutored eye of the spiritual man can see, and which it is a fruit of the Spirit for the spiritual foot to tread. God grant that we may have these fruits.

Beloved in the Lord, I am persuaded that no truth needs to be pressed more upon my own soul and yours than this, that positive fruit is the only test of our being in Christ. It is so easy for us to wrap ourselves up in the idea that attention to religious ceremonies is the test, but it is not so, for "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," who were the most religious people of their day, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." I know it is easy to think, "Well, I do not indulge in drunkenness; I am no rogue; I do not do this or that." This is little to the matter. Remember that the judgment will not be about those things which you do not do, but about positive things. How does Jesus Christ put that judgment matter? "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." The absence of positive fruit was that which condemned the lost. "Every tree," says John, "that beareth not fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire." He does not say, "Every tree that bears bitter fruit, or sour grapes," but "Every tree that bringeth forth no fruit." Fruitless professors, tremble! I may not speak so as to make this truth penetrate as I would it should into your inmost souls, but I pray the eternal Spirit to make it like fire in the bones of every deceived man and woman. If my Lord shall come to you, my hearer, day after day, as he once came to the fig-tree, and should find leaves upon you and no fruit, I tell you he will say, "Henceforth let no fruit be on thee for ever," and thou shalt wither away. What is his own parable! The master of the vineyard said to the husbandman, "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" And when the husbandman interceded, you will remember his intercession was only so far: "If it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Jesus the intercessor agrees with his Father the Husbandman; Mercy agrees with Justice; if there be no fruit, the tree must come down. May I beseech you to lay these things to heart. Thou must bear fruit unto God by the power of the Spirit, or it is down with thee. God fingers his axe this morning; it is sharp, and if he doth but lift it, woe to thee, barren fig tree! Woe, indeed, to me also, if I be found barren in the day of the Lord's appearing.

In closing this weighty business of self-examination, I must remind

you that our Lord tells us, that although these persons were in some points alike, *the solemn difference between them led to a solemn result.* "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." There are many ways in which the Lord takes away barren branches. Sometimes he allows the professor to apostatise. He gets rich, and then he will not go to the place of worship which he used to frequent when he was a poorer man, and was humble enough to hear the gospel; he must go to some fashionable place, where he can listen to anything but the truth; and thus by his own pride he is taken away. Or else he is allowed to fall into open sin. We always should regret the falls of professors, but sometimes it is possible that discovered sins may be a blessing, for they take away from the church men who never ought to have been there, and who were an injury to it. Many bright professors have stood well for a long time, but at last they have been snuffed out ecclesiastically by reason of their outward sins. God has taken them away. Some have been taken away in a more terrible sense by death; God has removed them. They have lived in the church and died in the church, but have been taken away in solemn judgment, and cast into the fire. Then there is a taking away which is worst of all, when the Master shall say, "Depart, ye cursed!" Now, do observe it: these were respectable people; these were people like you, decent, good people, who attended a place of worship, and contributed, and were very moral, but still they had not grace in their souls. They had nominal Christianity, but not the fruit of the Spirit; and what was done with them? "Lord, cannot some mild means be used? How sad to see these branches cut off!" "No," saith he, "if they bring not forth fruit, they must be taken away." "But, Lord, they never reeled in and out of the gin palace! Lord, they were much too good and much too amiable to be found amongst the debased and the debauched!" "Take them away; they brought no fruit, and they must be taken away." "But, Master, they were so diligent in the use of ordinances, they were so constant and regular in the form of prayer!" "They brought forth no fruit," saith he, "take them away." There is only this one thing for them: if they had through saving faith been made to bear the fruit of the Spirit, they should have been saved; but as there was no fruit, take them away.

What is done with that which is taken away? If I could take you just outside the garden wall, I would let you see a heap of weeds and slips that are taken from the vine, and there they are heaped together with a little straw, and the gardener burns them. The other branches with their purple clusters are in honour, but these dishonoured things are burnt outside the gate. I cannot picture to you that day of doom, that fate tremendous which shall come upon fruitless branches of the spiritual vine—outside the gate, with a great gulf fixed between them and heaven, where the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." If such people are cast away, what will become of some of you? If these good people who were in Christ, in a way, still perish, because they brought forth no fruit, O ye who are like hemlock in the furrows of the field, ye who produce the grapes of Gomorrha and the apples of Sodom, what shall be your doom in the day of account when the Master shall

come forth in robes of judgment to execute righteousness among the sons of men?

II. Briefly on the second point. THE TEXT CONVEYS INSTRUCTION.

Looking at it carefully, we observe that *the fruit-bearing branches are not perfect.* If they were perfect, they would not need pruning; but the fact is there is much of original inbred sin remaining in the best of God's people, so that whenever the sap within them is strong for the production of fruit, there is a tendency for that strength to turn into evil, and instead of good fruit evil is produced. It is the strength of the tree, and the richness of the sap which makes the branch produce too much wood, so that it needs pruning. The gardener desires to see that strength in clusters, but alas! instead it runs into wood. Now, observe that in a Christian when the sap comes into him to produce confidence in God, through the evil that is in him, it often produces confidence in himself, and he who should be strong in faith becomes strong in carnal security. When the sap would produce zeal, how very frequently it turns into rashness, and instead of zeal with knowledge, fanaticism is brought forth! Suppose the sap flows to produce self-examination, very generally unbelief is the outgrowth, and instead of the man doubting himself, he begins to doubt his Lord. How often have I seen even the joy of the Lord turned into pride, and when the man should rejoice in Christ Jesus, he has began to rejoice in himself, to grow proud and say, "What a fine experience I possess!" That love which we ought to bear towards our neighbours, how apt is that to run into love of the world and carnal complacency towards its evil ways! The gentleness which I praised just now, often turns to a silly compliance with everybody's whim, and meekness which is a fruit of the Spirit, how often that becomes an excuse for holding your tongue, when you ought boldly to speak! The fact is, it is very difficult to keep ourselves, when we are in a flourishing state, from producing wood instead of grapes. God grant us grace to keep us from this evil; and I do not know how the grace can come except by his judicious pruning.

I say the fruit-bearing branches are not perfect because they bear a great deal that is not fruit, and, moreover, not one of them bears as much fruit as it ought to do. I do not agree with Mr. Wesley's opinion about perfection. It is very difficult to see how he could have done more than he did, but I do not doubt that even *he* felt that he might have been more like his Lord. None of the Lord's people with whom I ever came into communion have dared to think themselves perfect; and if they had said so, and proved it, I should have rejoiced to think that there were such people, but greatly sorrowed to find that I belong to a very different order of beings myself; for "in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing." The Master is bringing us upon our way to bring forth more fruit, but as yet, the fruit-bearing branches are not perfect.

Hence we are taught, in the second place, that *pruning is the lot of all the fruitful saints.* You may escape it if you are not fruitful, you will be cut off, you will not be pruned, but all the fruit-bearing saints must feel the knife. Observe Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had not those patriarchs their trials? Moses and David, Jeremiah and Daniel, who among those escaped? Though they honoured their Master much, who escaped without the pruning knife? And if you come to the saints

of the New Testament, surely the flame was seven times hotter with regard to them than with regard to the elder brethren. How does the Lord prune his people, then? It is generally said by affliction; I question if that could be proved as it stands; it needs explanation. It is generally thought that our trials and troubles purge us: I am not sure of that, they certainly are lost upon some. Our Lord tells us what it is that prunes us. "Now," saith he, in the third verse of the chapter, "ye are clean (or pruned) through the word which I have spoken unto you." It is *the word* that prunes the Christian, it is the truth that purges him, the Scripture, made living and powerful by the Holy Spirit, effectually cleanses the Christian. "What then does affliction do?" say you. Well, if I may say so, affliction is the handle of the knife; affliction is the grindstone that sharpens up the word; affliction is the dresser which removes our soft garments, and lays bare the diseased flesh, so that the surgeon's lancet may get at it; affliction makes us ready to feel the word, but the true pruner is the word in the hand of the Great Husbandman. Sometimes when you lay stretched upon the bed of sickness, you think more upon the word than you did before, that is one great thing. In the next place, you see more the applicability of that word to yourself. In the third place, the Holy Spirit makes you feel more, while you are thus laid aside, the force of the word than you did before. Ask that affliction may be sanctified, beloved, but always remember there is no more tendency in affliction in itself to sanctify us than there is in prosperity; in fact, the natural tendency of affliction is to make us rebel against God, which is quite opposite to sanctification. It is the word coming to us while in affliction that purges us; it is God the Holy Ghost laying home divine truth, and applying the blood of Jesus, and working in all his divine energy in the soul; it is this that prunes us, and affliction is only the handle of the knife, or what if I say the ladder which the gardener takes to reach the vine, so that he may prune it the better! Now, it may be that some of us have been afflicted a great deal, and have not been pruned. I know some people who have been very poor, I do not see that they are any better for it, and I know some others who have been very sick, and I have never heard that they have been improved. Alas! some people are of such a character, that if they were stricken till their whole head were sick, and their whole heart faint, they would not be benefited; if they were beaten till they were all bruises and putrifying sores, they would still go on to rebel, for these things only provoke them to a greater hatred against the Most High. We must be pruned, but it must be by the word, through affliction.

Now, *the object in this pruning is never condemnatory.* God does not purge his children with a view to visit them penally for sin; he chastises, but he cannot punish those for whom Jesus Christ has been already punished. You have no right to say, when a man is afflicted, that it is because he has done wrong; on the contrary, "every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth." Just the branch that is good for something gets the pruning knife. Do not say of yourselves, or of other people, "That man must have been a great offender, or he would not have met with such a judgment." Nonsense, who a holier man than Job; but who brought lower than he? Why, the fact is, it is because

the Lord loves his people that he chastens them, not because of any anger that he hath towards them. But learn, beloved, especially you under trial, not to see an angry God in your pains or your losses, or your crosses; but instead thereof, see a husbandman, who thinks you a branch whom he estimates at so great a rate, that he will take the trouble to prune you, which he would not do if he had not a kind consideration towards you.

The real reason is that more fruit may be produced; which I understand to mean more in *quantity*. A good man, who feels the power of the word pruning him of this and that superfluity, sets to work, in the power of the Holy Ghost, to do more for Jesus. Before he was afflicted he did not know how to be patient. He learns it at last—a hard lesson. Before he was poor he did not know how to be humble, but he learns that. Before the word came with power he did not know how to pray with his fellows, or to speak to sinners, or lay himself out for usefulness; but the more he is pruned, the more he serves his Lord. More fruit in *variety* too, may be intended. One tree can only produce one kind of fruit usually, but the Lord's people can produce many, as we have already seen; and the more they are pruned the more they will produce. There will be all kinds of fruits, both new and old, which they will lay up for their beloved. There will be more in *quality* too. The man may not pray more, but he will pray more earnestly; he may not preach more sermons, but he will preach them more thoroughly from his heart, with a greater unction. It may be that he will not be more in communion with God as to time, but it will be a closer communion; he will throw himself more thoroughly into the divine element of communion, and will become more hearty in all that he does.

This is the result of the pruning which our heavenly Father gives; and if such be the result, the Lord keep on pruning, for *what greater blessing can a man have than to produce much fruit for God?* Better to serve God much than to become a prince. He that doeth much for Christ, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. He is glorifying God; he is blessing his fellow men; he is bringing joy into his own spirit. Oh, if on bended knee we might seek but one favour, methinks we would not ask the wisdom which Solomon craved; we would petition for this, that we might bring forth much fruit, that so we might be Christ's disciples.

III. To conclude. Our text INVITES MEDITATION.

I will hint at the points on which it invites our thoughts. It suggests to every unconverted person here this one question. It seems that it is not very easy for the righteous to be saved: "*If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the wicked appear?*" If the branches in Christ that bear no fruit, are taken away, what must become of the Sabbath-breakers, the despisers of God, the atheists, the drunkards, the unchaste, the dishonest, the blasphemers? I raise the question—solve it! Let it burn into your soul!

Secondly, *what a mercy it is to the believer that it is pruning with him and not cutting off!* Ah, let the knife be very sharp, let the word throw us into the great deeps, till we almost despair; yet, thank God, we are not cast into hell! Dear friends, your prayer should be, "Lord, let thy word cut deep into me. Do not let the preacher mince matters

with me. Deliver him from sewing pillows under my armholes, and lulling me to sleep. Lord, I would be faithfully dealt with! I put the proud flesh before thee, cut it out, that the wound heal not so as to be worse when healed than it was when a running sore." What a mercy it is not to be cut off! Ah, Christian, you are desponding and doubting to-day, while the word is searching you, but you might have been in hell! Think of that. You are poor, or you are full of pain, but you might have been driven from the presence of God. How can you, as a living man, complain, whatever God may place upon you?

In the next place, it would be well to *think how gently the pruning has been done with the most of us* up till now, compared with our barrenness. I wonder the Lord has not cut us about much more. He who has a deep-seated disease requires sharp medicine; and when the sore runs deep, the doctor must cut deep too. With all the rust that is on us, I wonder we are not filed more. There is so much alloy, it is marvellous that we are not oftener put into the fire. O Spirit of God, thou hast hard work with some of us, still we bless thee, for thy gentleness hath been manifested very graciously. How tenderly hast thou dealt with our frail dust, O God of love!

Again, *how earnestly we ought to seek for more fruit.* If this is what God seeks after, we should be after it. If he often goes the length of pruning the vine, although he does not love to do it, for he does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men for nought, let us agree with God, and seek to yield more fruit.

How concerned should every one of us be to be efficaciously and truly one with Christ! I ought to have said that the whole gist of the text lies in that "in *me*, in *me*, in *me*." You see, if a man is not in Christ at all, why then, of course, there is no hope of any sort; and then, when he is in Christ, there comes the question, is he in Christ by living faith, by real trust? has he the faith of God's elect? has he been born again from above? is he a spiritual grace-taught soul? Let this be the question which shall rest upon our minds. I would that this morning my text might be sweet to you; sweet, I said, because if for the moment it seemeth bitter, the end is sweetness. Faithful are the wounds of such a friend as Jesus. If he has wounded any of you, it is not to drive you from him, but to make you cling the closer to him. Have you never learned that, when you feel the most humbled, most afraid, most full of sin, most conscious of your own imperfection, the best thing is to cling to Christ the more? "Well, Lord, if I have been the most cursed hypocrite that ever lived, I will come to thee now. If up to this moment I have been deceived, and have not had a grain of true faith, nor a single one of the fruits of the Spirit, yet here I am, a poor black sinner, I to the fountain fly; a naked sinner, I wrap thy righteousness about my loins; a poor sin-sick, lost sinner, I look up to thee on yonder cross, and I do believe that thou canst save me. From the very jaws of death, and out of the belly of hell, do I cry unto thee, and thou wilt hear me. O sinners and saints, come to Christ again, whether you are his experimentally, or are strangers to him, come to him now, for still the gospel-bell rings out sweetly, "Whosoever *will*, let him take the water of life freely." O God, grant us grace to come now afresh, and his be the praise! Amen, and Amen.

Without Christ—Nothing

"Without me ye can do nothing"—John xv. 5.

THIS is not the language of a man of ordinary mould. No saint, no prophet, no apostle would ever have addressed a company of faithful men, and have said to them, "Without me ye can do nothing." Had Jesus Christ been, as some say, a good man, and nothing more, such language as this would have been unseemly and inconsistent. Among the virtues of a perfect man we must certainly reckon modesty, but this from a mere man would have been shamelessly immodest. It is impossible to conceive that Jesus of Nazareth, had he not been more than man, could ever have uttered the sentence, "Without me ye can do nothing." My brethren, I hear in this sentence the voice of that Divine Person without whom was not anything made that was made. The majesty of the words reveals the Godhead of him that uttered them. The "I am" comes out in the personal word "me," and the claim of all power unveils the Omnipotent. These words mean Godhead or nothing. The spirit in which we listen to this language is that of adoration. Let us bow our heads in solemn worship, and so unite with the multitude before the throne who ascribe power and dominion and might to him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb.

In this adoring state of mind we shall be the better prepared to enter into the innermost soul of the text. I am not going to preach upon the moral inability of the unregenerate, although in that doctrine I most firmly believe; for that truth did not come in our Lord's way when he uttered these words, neither did he allude to it. It is quite true that unregenerate men, being without Christ, can do no spiritual action whatever, and can do nothing which is acceptable in the sight of God; but our Lord was not speaking to unregenerate men at all, nor speaking about them. He was surrounded by his apostles, the eleven out of whom Judas had been weeded, and it is to them as branches of the true vine that he says, "Without me ye can do nothing." The statement refers to such as are in the vine, and even to such as have been pruned, and have for a while been found abiding in the stem, which is Christ; even

in such there is an utter incapacity for holy produce if separated from Christ.

We are not called upon just now to speak upon all forms of doing, as beyond us, but of that form of it which is intended in the text. There are certain forms of doing in which men excel who know little or nothing of Christ; but the text must be viewed in its own connection, and the truth is clear. Believers are here described under the figure of branches in the vine, and the doing alluded to must therefore be the bearing of fruit. I might render it, "Apart from me ye can produce nothing—make nothing, create nothing, bring forth nothing." The reference, therefore, is to that doing which may be set forth by the fruit of the vine branch, and therefore to those good works and graces of the Spirit which are expected from men who are spiritually united to Christ: it is of these that he says, "Without me ye can do nothing." Our text is only another form of the fourth verse: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me." I am therefore going to address myself to you who profess to know and love the Lord, and are anxious to glorify his name, and I have to remind you that union to Christ is essential; for only as you are one with him, and continue to be so, can you bring forth the fruits which prove you to be truly his.

I. Reading again this solemn sentence, "Without me ye can do nothing," it first of all excites in me AN ASPIRATION OF HOPE. There is something to be *done*, our religion is to have a grand practical outcome. I have been thinking of Christ as the vine, and of the myriads of branches in him, and my heart has hoped for great things. From such a root what a vintage must come! Being branches in him, what fruit we must produce! There can be nothing scanty or poverty-stricken in the fruitage of a vine so full of sap. Fruit of the best quality, fruit in the utmost abundance, fruit unrivalled, must be borne by such a vine. That word "*do*" has music in it. Yes, brethren, Jesus went about about doing good, and, being in him, we shall do good. Everything about him is efficient, practical,—in a word, fruit-bearing; and being joined to him much will yet be done by us. We have been saved by the almighty grace of God apart from all doings of our own, and now that we are saved we long to *do* something in return: we feel a high ambition to be of some use and service to our great Lord and Master. The text, even though there be a negative in it, yet raises in our soul the hope that ere we go hence and be no more we may even here on earth do something for Christ.

Beloved, there is the ambition and hope before us of doing something in the way of glorifying God by bringing forth *the fruits of holiness, peace, and love.* We would adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by love unfeigned, by every good and holy work we would show forth the praises of our God. Apart from the Lord Jesus we know we cannot be holy; but joined unto him we overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and walk with garments unspotted from the world. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and all manner of holy conversation. For none of these things are we equal in and of ourselves, and yet by faith we say

with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." We may be adorned with plentiful clusters, we may cause the Saviour to have joy in us that our joy may be full: great possibilities are before us.

We aspire not only to produce fruit in ourselves, but to bear much *fruit in the conversion of others*, even as Paul desired concerning the Romans, that he might have fruit among them. In this matter we can do nothing whatever alone; but being united unto Christ we bring forth increase unto the Lord. Our Lord Jesus said, "The works that I do shall ye do also, and greater works than these shall ye do, because I go unto the Father." Brethren, a hope springs up in our bosom that we may each one of us bring many souls to Jesus. Not because we have any power in ourselves, but because we are united to Jesus we joyfully hope to bring forth fruit in the way of leading others to the knowledge of the gospel.

My soul takes fire of hope, and I say to myself, If it be so, all these branches, and all alive, how much *fruit of further blessing* will ripen for this poor world. Men shall be blessed in us because we are blessed in Christ. What must be the influence of ten thousand godly examples! What must be the influence upon our country of thousands of Christian men and women practically advancing love, peace, justice, virtue, holiness! And if each one is seeking to bring others to Christ what numerous conversions there must be, and how largely must the church of God be increased. Do you not know that if there were only ten thousand real Christians in the world, yet if each one of these brought one other to Christ every year it would not need twenty years to accomplish the conversion of the entire population of the globe? This is a simple sum in arithmetic which any schoolboy can work out. Certainly it looks a small thing that each one should bring another to the Lord; and surely if we are one with him we may hope to see it done. So I sit me down and dream right comfortably, according to the promise, "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." See these thousands of branches, proceeding from such a stem as Christ Jesus, and with such sap as the Holy Ghost flowing through them; why, surely, this vine must soon clothe the mountains with its verdure, and there shall not remain a single barren rock unadorned with the blessed foliage! Then shall the mountains drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. Not because of any natural fertility in the branches, but because of their glorious root, and stem, and sap, each one shall bear full clusters, and each fruitful bough shall run over the wall. Beloved friends in Christ, have you not strong desires to see some such consummation? Do you not long to take a share in the high enterprise of winning the world to Christ? Oh, ye that are young and full of spirits, do you not long to press to the front of this great crusade? Our souls pine to see the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea. It is glad tidings to us that, joined unto Christ, we can do something in this great business, something upon which the Lord will smile, something which shall redound to the glory of his name. We are not condemned to inaction; we are not denied the joy of service, the superior blessedness of giving and of doing: the Lord hath chosen us and ordained us to go and bring forth fruit, fruit that shall remain. This is the aspiration

which rises in our soul; the Lord grant that we may see it take actual form in our lives.

II. But now, in the second place, there passes through my heart a shudder,—A SHUDDER OF FEAR. Albeit I glow and burn with strong desire, and rise upon the wing of a mighty ambition to do something great for Christ, yet I read the text, and a sudden trembling takes hold upon me. "Without me":—it is possible, then, that I may be without Christ, and so may be utterly incapacitated for all good. Come, friends, I want you to feel, even though it cast a cold chill over you, that you may possibly be "without Christ." I would have you feel it in the very marrow of your bones, yea, in the centre of your hearts. You profess to be in Christ; but are you so? The large majority of those to whom I speak this morning are visible members of the visible church of Christ; but what if you should *not be so in him as to bring forth fruit?* Evidently there are branches which in a certain sense are in the vine, and yet bring forth no fruit! It is written, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away." Yes, you are a member, perhaps an elder, perhaps a deacon, possibly a minister, and so you are in the vine; but are you bringing forth the fruits of holiness? Are you consecrated? Are you endeavouring to bring others to Jesus Christ? Or is your profession a thing apart from a holy life, and devoid of all influence upon others? Does it give you a name among the people of God and nothing more? Say, is it a mere natural association with the church, or is it a living, supernatural union with Christ? Let the thought go through you and prostrate you before him who looks down from heaven upon you, and lifts his pierced hand, and cries, "Without me ye can do nothing." My friend, if you are without Christ, what is the use of carrying on that Bible-class; for you can do nothing? What is the use of my coming to this pulpit if I am without Christ? What is the use of your going down into the Sunday-school this afternoon if, after all, you are without Christ? Unless we have the Lord Jesus ourselves we cannot take him to others. Unless within us we have the living water springing up unto eternal life, we cannot overflow so that out of our midst shall flow rivers of living water.

I will put the thought another way,—What if you should be in Christ, and *not so in him as to abide in him?* It appears from our Lord's words that some branches in him are cast forth and are withered. "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered." Some who are called by his name, and reckoned among his disciples, whose names are heard whenever the muster-roll of the church is read, yet do not continue in him. My hearer, what if it should happen that you are only in Christ on a Sunday, but in the world all the week! What if you are only in Christ at the communion table, or at the prayer-meeting, or at certain periods of devotion? What if you are off and on with Christ! What if you play fast and loose with the Lord! What if you are an outside saint and an inside devil! Ah me, what will come of such conduct as this? And yet some persist in attempting to hold an intermittent communion with Christ; in Christ to-day because it is the Sabbath; out of Christ to-morrow because it is the market, and obedience to Christ might be inconvenient when they buy and sell. This will not do. We must be so in Christ as to be always in him, or else

we are not living branches of the living vine, and we cannot produce fruit. If there were such a thing as a vine branch that was only occasionally joined to the stem, would you expect it to yield a cluster to the husbandman? So neither can you if you are off and on with Christ. You can do nothing if there be not constant union.

One year when I was travelling towards my usual winter resting-place I halted at Marseilles, and there was overtaken by great pain. In my room in the hotel I found it cold, and so I asked for a fire. I was sitting in a very desponding mood, when suddenly the tears came to my eyes, as if smitten with a great sorrow. I shall never forget the thoughts which stirred my heart. The porter came in to light the fire. He had in his hand a bundle of twigs. I called to him to let me look at it. He was about to push it into the stove as fuel with which to kindle the fire. As I took the bundle into my hand, I found it was made of vine branches—branches that had been cut off now that the pruning time was come. Ah me, I thought, will this be my portion? Here I am, away from home, unable to bear fruit, as I love to do. Shall I end with this as my portion? Shall I be gathered for the fire? Those vine shoots were parts of a good vine, no doubt—branches that once looked fair and green; but now they were fuel for the flame. They had been cut off and cast off as useless things, and then men gathered them and tied them in bundles, and they were ignobly thrust into the fire. What a picture! There goes a bundle of ministers into the fire! There is a bundle of elders! There's another bundle of deacons, a bundle of church members, a bundle of Sunday-school teachers! "Men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." Dear brothers and sisters, shall this be the lot of any of us who have named the name of Christ? Well did I say a shudder may go through us as we listen to those words, "without me." Our end without Christ will be terrible indeed. First, no fruit; then no life; and at last no place among the saints, no existence in the church of God. Without Christ we do nothing, we are nothing, we are worse than nothing. This is the condition of the heathen now, and it was our own condition once; God forbid that we should find it to be our condition now—"without Christ, having no hope!" Here is grave cause for heart-searching, and I leave the matter with you to that end.

III. Having come so far in our second head, under the third I behold A VISION OF TOTAL FAILURE. "Without me," says the text, "ye can do nothing"—ye can produce nothing. The visible church of Christ has tried this experiment a great many times already, and always with the same result. Separated from Christ, his church can do nothing which she was formed to do. She is sent into the world upon a high enterprise, with noble aims before her, and grand forces at her disposal; but if she could cease from communion with Christ she would become wholly incapable.

Now what are the outward signs of any community being apart from Christ? Answer, first, It may be seen in *a ministry without Christ in its doctrine.* This we have seen ourselves. Woe worth the day that it is so! History tells us that not only in the Romish church and the Anglican church, but among the Nonconformist churches, Christ has been at times forgotten. Not only among Unitarians, but among Presbyterians,

Methodists, Baptists, all round, Jesus has been dishonoured, Attempts have been made to do something without Christ as the truth to be preached. Ah me, what folly it is! They preach up intellectualism, and hope that this will be the great power of God; but it is not. "Surely," say they, "novelties of thought and refinements of speech will attract and win! The preachers aspire to be leaders of thought; will they not command the multitude and charm the intelligent? Add music and architecture, and what is to hinder success?" Many a young minister has given up his whole mind to this—to try and be exceedingly refined and intellectual; and what has he done with these showy means? The sum total is expressed in the text—"Nothing": "Without me ye can do nothing." What emptiness this folly has created: when the pulpit is without Christ the pews are soon without people. I knew a chapel where an eminent divine was to be heard for years. A converted Jew coming to London to visit a friend, set out on Sunday morning to find a place of Christian worship, and he chanced to enter the chapel of this eminent divine. When he came back he said that he feared he had made a mistake; he had turned into a building which he hoped was a Christian place of assembly; but as he had not heard the name of Jesus all the morning, he thought perhaps he had fallen in with some other religionists. I fear that many modern sermons might just as fairly have been delivered in a Mahometan mosque as in a Christian church. We have too many preachers of whom we might complain, "they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Christianity without Christ is a strange thing indeed. And what comes of it where it is held up to the people? Why, by-and-by there are not enough people to support the ministry; empty benches are plentiful, and the thing gets pretty nearly wound up. Blessed be God for it! I am heartily glad that without Christ these pretended ministers cannot prosper. Leave Christ out of the preaching and you shall do nothing. Only advertize it all over London, Mr. Baker, that you are making bread without flour; put it in every paper, "Bread without flour;" and you may soon shut up your shop, for your customers will hurry off to other tradesmen. Somehow there is a strange prejudice in people's minds in favour of bread made of flour, and there is also an unaccountable prejudice in the human mind which makes men think that if there be a gospel it must have Christ in it. A sermon without Christ as its beginning, middle, and end is a mistake in conception and a crime in execution. However grand the language it will be merely much-ado-about-nothing if Christ be not there. Ay, and I mean by Christ not merely his example and the ethical precepts of his teaching, but his atoning blood, his wondrous satisfaction made for human sin, and the grand doctrine of "believe and live." If "Life for a look at the Crucified One" be obscured, all is dark; if justification by faith be not set in the very forefront in the full blaze of light, nothing can be accomplished. Without Christ in the doctrine ye shall do nothing.

Further, without acknowledging always *the absolute supremacy of Christ* we shall do nothing. Jesus is much complimented nowadays; but he is not submitted to as absolute Lord. I hear many pretty things about Christ from men who reject his gospel. "Lives of Christ"

we have in any quantity. Oh for one which would set him forth in his glory as God, as Head of the church and Lord of all. I should greatly like to see a "Life of Christ" written by one who knew him by communion with him and by reverently sitting at his feet. Most of the pretty things about Jesus which I read nowadays seem to have been written by persons who have seen him through a telescope at a great distance, and know him "according to Matthew," but not according to personal fellowship. Oh for a "Life of Christ" by Samuel Rutherford or George Herbert, or by some other sweet spirit to whom the ever-blessed One is as a familiar friend. Certain modern praises of Jesus are written upon the theory that, on the whole, the Saviour has given us a religion that is tolerably suited to the enlightenment of the nineteenth century, and may be allowed to last a little longer. Jesus is commended by these critics, and somewhat admired as preferable to most teachers; but he is by no means to be blindly followed. It is fortunate for Jesus that he commends himself to the "best thought" and ripest culture of the period; for, if he had not done so, these wise gentlemen would have exposed him as being behind the times. Of course they have every now and then to rectify certain of his dogmas, especially such as justification by faith, or atonement, or the doctrine of election —these are old-fashioned things, which belong to an older and less enlightened period, and therefore they adapt them by tearing out their real meaning. The doctrines of grace, according to the infallible critics of the period, are out of date—nobody believes them now, and so they settle off old-fashioned believers as non-existent. Christ is rectified and squared, and his garment without seam is taken off, and he is dressed out in proper style, as by a West-End clothier; then he is introduced to us as a remarkable teacher, and we are advised to accept him as far as he goes. For the present the wise ones tolerate Jesus; but there is no telling what is to come: the progress of this age is so astonishing that it is just possible we shall before long leave Christ and Christianity behind. Now, what will come of this foolish wisdom? Nothing but delusions, mischief, infidelity, anarchy, and all manner of imaginable and unimaginable ills. The fact is, if you do not acknowledge Christ to be all, you have virtually left him out, and are without him. We must preach the gospel, because Christ has revealed it. "Thus saith the Lord," is to be our logic. We must preach the gospel as ambassadors delivering their message; that is to say, in the King's name, by an authority not their own. We preach our doctrines, not because we consider that they are convenient and profitable, but because Christ has commanded us to proclaim them. We believe the doctrines of grace, not because the enlightenment of the age sets its wonderful imprimatur upon them, but because they are true and are the voice of God. Age or no age has nothing to do with us. The world hates Christ and must hate him: if it would boldly denounce Christ it would be to us a more hopeful sign than its deceitful Judas kiss. We keep simply to this,—the Lord hath said it, and we care not who approves or disapproves. Jesus is God and Head of the church, and we must do what he bids us, and say what he tells us: if we fail in this, nothing of good will come of it. If the church gets back to her loyalty she shall see what her Lord will do; but without Christ as absolute Lord,

infallible Teacher, and honoured King, all must be failure even to the end.

Go a little further: you may have sound doctrine, and yet do nothing unless you have Christ *in your spirit.* I have known all the doctrines of grace to be unmistakably preached, and yet there have been no conversions; for this reason, that they were not expected and scarcely desired. In former years many orthodox preachers thought it to be their sole duty to comfort and confirm the godly few who by dint of great perseverance found out the holes and corners in which they prophesied. These brethren spoke of sinners as of people whom God might possibly gather in if he thought fit to do so; but they did not care much whether he did so or not. As to weeping over sinners as Christ wept over Jerusalem; as to venturing to invite them to Christ as the Lord did when he stretched out his hands all the day long; as to lamenting with Jeremiah over a perishing people, they had no sympathy with such emotions, and feared that they savoured of Arminianism. Both preacher and congregation were cased in a hard shell, and lived as if their own salvation was the sole design of their existence. If anybody did grow zealous and seek conversions, straightway they said he was indiscreet, or conceited. When a church falls into this condition it is, as to its spirit, "without Christ." What comes of it? Some of you know by your own observation what does come of it. The comfortable corporation exists and grows for a little while, but it comes to nothing in the long run; and so it must: there can be no fruit-bearing where there is not the spirit of Christ as well as the doctrine of Christ. Except the spirit of the Lord rests upon you, causing you to agonize for the salvation of men even as Jesus did, ye can do nothing.

But above all things we must have Christ with us in the power of *his actual presence.* Do we always think of this—"Without me ye can do nothing"? We are going out this afternoon to teach the young; shall we be quite sure to take Christ with us? or on the road shall we suddenly stop and say, "I am without my Master, and I must not dare to go another step"? The abiding consciousness of the love of Christ in our soul is the essential element of our strength. We can no more convert a sinner without Christ than we could light up new stars in the sky. Power to change the human will, power to enlighten the intellect as to the things of God, and to influence the mind as to repentance and faith, must come entirely from the Most High. Do we feel that? or do we put our thoughts together for an address, and say, "Now, that is a strong point, and that will produce effect"; and do we rest there? If so, we can do nothing at all. The power lies with the Master, not with the servant; the might is in the hand, not in the weapon. We must have Christ in these pews and in these aisles, and in this pulpit, and Christ down in our Sunday-school, and Christ at the street corner when we stand up there to talk of him, and we must feel that he is with us even to the end of the world, or we shall do nothing.

We have, then, before us a vision of total failure if we attempt in any way to do without Christ. He says, "Without me ye can do nothing:" it is in the *doing* that the failure is most conspicuous. You may *talk* a good deal without him; you may hold congresses, and conferences, and conventions; but *doing* is another matter. Without Jesus you can

talk any quantity; but without him you can *do* nothing. The most eloquent discourse without him will be all a bottle of smoke. You shall lay your plans, and arrange your machinery, and start your schemes; but without the Lord you will do nothing. Immeasurable cloudland of proposals and not a spot of solid doing large enough for a dove's foot to rest on—such shall be the end of all! You may have all the money that generosity can lavish, all the learning that your universities can supply, and all the oratory that the most gifted can lay at your feet; but "without me," saith Christ, "ye can do nothing." Fuss, flare, fireworks, and failure; that is the end of it. "Without me ye can do nothing." Let me repeat those words again, "Do nothing." "Do nothing," and the world dying around us! Africa in darkness! China perishing! Hindostan sunk in superstition, and a church which can do nothing! No bread to be handed out to the hungry, and the multitude fainting and dying! The rock to be smitten and the water of life to leap out for the thirsty, but not a drop forthcoming, because Jesus is not there. Ministers, evangelists, churches, salvation armies, the world dies for want of you, and yet "ye can do nothing" if your Lord is away. The age shall advance in discovery, and men of science shall do their little best, but you shall do "nothing" without Christ, absolutely nothing! You shall not proceed a single inch upon your toilsome way, though you row till the oars snap with the strain; you shall be drifted back by winds and currents unless you take Jesus into the ship. Remember that all the while the great Husbandman is watching you, for his eye is on every vine-branch. He sees that you are producing no grapes, and he is coming round with that sharp knife of his, cutting here and there! What must become of you who produce nothing? It makes one's very soul to curdle within him to think that we should live to do nothing. Yet I fear that thousands of Christians get no further than this; they are not immoral, dishonest, or profane; but they do nothing. They think of what they would like to do, and they plan and they propose; but they *do* nothing. There are buds in plenty, but not a single grape is produced and all because they do not get into that vital, overflowing, effectual communion with Christ which would fill them with life, and constrain them to bring forth fruit unto the glory of God. There is a vision, then, of the failure all along the line if we try to do without Christ.

IV. But now, fourthly, I hear A VOICE OF WISDOM, a still small voice which speaks out of the text, and says to us who are in Christ, *let us acknowledge this.* Down on your knees, bow your mouths in the dust and say, "Lord, it is true: without thee we can do nothing, nothing whatever that is good and acceptable in the sight of God. We have not ability of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, but our ability is of God." Now, do not speak thus, as if you paid a compliment which orthodoxy requires you to make; but from the deeps of your soul, smitten with an absolute self-despair, own the truth unto God. "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which I would I find not." Lord, I am a good-for-nothing do-nothing, a fruitless, barren, dry, rotten branch without thee, and this I feel in my inmost soul. Be not far from me, but quicken me by thy presence.

Next, *let us pray.* If without Christ we can do nothing, let us cry to

him that we may never be without him. Let us with strong crying and tears entreat his abiding presence. He comes to those who seek him: let us never cease seeking. In conscious fellowship with him, let us plead that the fellowship should be unbroken evermore. Let us pray that we may be so knit and joined to Jesus that we may be one spirit with him, never to be separated from him again. Master and Lord, let the life floods of thy grace never cease to flow into us, for we know that we must be thus supplied or we can produce nothing. Brethren, let us have much more prayer than has been usual among us. Prayer is appointed to convey the blessings God ordains to give; let us constantly use the appointed means, and may the result be ever increasing from day to day.

Next, *let us personally cleave to Jesus.* Let us not attempt a life of separation; for that were to seek the living among the dead. Do not let us depart from him for a single minute. Would you like to be caught at any one second of your life in a condition in which you could do nothing? I must confess I should not like to be in that state—incapable of defence against my enemies, or of service for my Lord. If an awakened one should come before you under distress of mind, and you should feel quite incapable of doing any good to him, what a sad perplexity. Or if you did not *feel* incapable, and yet should really be so, and what if you should therefore talk on in a religious way, but know no power in it; would it not be a sad thing? May you never be in such a state that you would be a do-nothing, with opportunities afforded and yet without strength to utilize them! If you are divided from Christ you are divided from the possibility of doing good; cling, therefore, to the Saviour with your whole might, and let nothing take you off from him; no, not for an hour.

Heartily submit yourselves, also, dear friends, to the Lord's headship and leadership, and ask to do everything in his style and way. He will not be with you unless you accept him as your Master. There must be no quarrel about supremacy, but you must yield yourself up absolutely to him, to be, to do, or to suffer, according to his will. When it is wholly so he will be with you, and you shall do everything that is required of you. Wonderful things will the Lord perform through you when once he is your all in all. Will we not have it so?

Once more; *joyfully believe in him.* Though without him you can do nothing, yet with him all things are possible. Omnipotence is in that man who has Christ in him. Weakness itself you may be, but you shall learn to glory in that weakness because the power of Christ doth rest upon you if your union and communion with Christ are continually kept up. Oh for a grand confidence in Christ! We have not believed in him yet up to the measure of the hem of his garment; for even that faith made the sick woman whole. Oh to believe up to the measure of his infinite Deity! Oh for the splendour of the faith which measures itself by the Christ in whom it trusts! May God bring us there, then shall we bring forth much fruit to the glory of his name.

V. And now, lastly. While I was listening to my text as a child puts a shell to its ear and listens till it hears the deep sea rolling in its windings, I heard within my text A SONG OF CONTENT. "Without me ye can do nothing." My heart said, "Lord, what is there that I

want to do without thee? There is no pain in this thought to me. If I can do without thee I am sorry to possess so dangerous a power. I am happy to be deprived of all strength except that which comes from thee. It charms, it exhilarates, and delights my soul to think that thou art my all. Thou hast made me penniless as to all wealth of my own, that I might dip my hand into thy treasury; thou hast taken all power away from every sinew and muscle of mine, that I may rest on thy bosom." "Without me ye can do nothing." Be it so. Brethren, are you not all agreed? Do you wish to have it altered, any of you that love his dear name? I am sure you do not; for suppose, dear friends, we could do something without Christ, then he would not have the glory of it. Who wishes that? There would be little crowns for our poor little heads, for we should have done something without him; but now there is one great crown for that dear head which once was girt with thorns; for all his saints put together cannot do anything without him. The goodly fellowship of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, and the triumphant host of the redeemed by blood, all put together, can do nothing without Jesus. Let him be crowned with majesty who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure. For our own sakes, for our Lord's sake, we are glad that it is so. All things are more ours by being his; and if our fruit is his rather than our own, it is none the less but all the more ours. Is not this rare music for a holy ear?

I feel so glad that without Christ we can do nothing because I fear that if the church could do something without Christ she would try to live without him. If she could teach the school and bring the children to salvation without Christ, I am afraid Christ would never go into a Sunday-school again. If we could preach successfully without Jesus, I suspect that the Lord Jesus Christ would seldom stand on high among the people again. If our Christian literature could bless men without Christ, I am afraid we should set the printing-press going, and never think about the crucified One in the matter. If there could be work done by the church without Jesus, there would be rooms into which he would never be invited; and these would soon become a sort of Blue Beard's chambers, full of horror. A something that we could do without Christ! Why the mass of the church would get to working that machinery tremendously, and all the rest would be neglected, and so it is a blessed thing for the whole church that she must have Christ everywhere.

"Without me ye can do nothing." As I listened to the song within these words I began to laugh: I wonder if you will laugh too. It was to myself I laughed, like Abraham of old. I thought of those who are going to destroy the orthodox doctrine from off the face of the earth. How they boast of the decline and death of old-fashioned evangelism. I have read once or twice that I am the last of the Puritans, the race is all dying out. To this I demur: I am willing to be esteemed last in merit, but not last as ending the race. There are many others who are steadfast in the faith. They say our old theology is decaying, and that nobody believes it. It is all a lie; but wise men say so, and therefore we are bound to consider ourselves obsolete and extinct. We are, in their esteem, as much out of date as antediluvians would be could

they walk down our streets. Yes, they are going to quench our coal and blot us out from Israel. Newspapers and reviews and the general intelligence of the age all join to dance upon our graves. Put on your night-caps, ye good people of the evangelical order, and go home to bed and sleep the sleep of the righteous, for the end of you is come. Thus say the Philistines, but the armies of the Lord think not so. The adversaries exult exceedingly; but Christ is not with them. They know very little about him, they do not work in his spirit, nor cry him up, nor extol the gospel of his precious blood, and so I believe that when they have done their little best it will come to nothing. "Without me ye can do nothing:" if this be true of apostles, much more of opposers! If his friends can do nothing without him, I am sure his foes can do nothing against him. If they that follow his steps and lie in his bosom can do nothing without him, I am sure his adversaries cannot, and so I laughed at their laughter and smiled at their confusion. I laughed, too, because I recollected a story of a New England service when the pastor one afternoon was preaching in his own solemn way, and the good people were listening or sleeping, as their minds inclined. It was a substantial edifice wherein they assembled, fit to outlive an earthquake. All went on peacefully in the meeting-house that afternoon till suddenly a lunatic started up, denounced the minister, and declared that he would at once pull down the meeting-house about their ears. Taking hold of one of the pillars of the gallery, this newly-announced Samson repeated his threatening. Everybody rose; the women were ready to faint; the men began to rush to the door, and there was danger that the people would be trodden on as they rushed down the aisles. There was about to be a great tumult; no one could see the end of it; when suddenly one cool brother sitting near the pulpit produced a calm by a single sentence. "Let him try!" was the stern sarcasm which hushed the tempest. Even so to-day the enemy is about to disprove the gospel and crush out the doctrines of grace. Are you distressed, alarmed, astounded? So far from that, my reply to the adversary's boast that he will pull down the pillars of our Zion is this only,—LET HIM TRY! Amen.

The Secret of Power in Prayer

"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"—John xv. 7.

THE gifts of grace are not enjoyed all at once by believers. Coming unto Christ, we are saved by a true union with him; but it is by abiding in that union that we further receive the purity, the joy, the power, the blessedness, which are stored up in him for his people. See how our Lord states this when he speaks to the believing Jews in the eighth chapter of this gospel, at the thirty-first and thirty-second verses:—"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." We do not know all the truth at once: we learn it by abiding in Jesus. Perseverance in grace is an educational process by which we learn the truth fully. The emancipating power of that truth is also gradually perceived and enjoyed. "The truth shall make you free." One bond after another snaps, and we are free indeed. You that are young beginners in the divine life may be cheered to know that there is something better still for you: you have not yet received the full recompense of your faith. As your hymn puts it—"It is better on before." You shall have happier views of heavenly things as you climb the hill of spiritual experience. As you abide in Christ you shall have firmer confidence, richer joy, greater stability, more communion with Jesus, and greater delight in the Lord your God. Infancy is beset with many evils from which manhood is exempt: it is the same in the spiritual as in the natural world.

There are these degrees of attainment among believers, and the Saviour here incites us to reach a high position by mentioning a certain privilege which is not for all who say that they are in Christ, but for those only who are *abiders* in him. Every believer should be an abider, but many have hardly earned the name as yet. Jesus says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." You have to live with Christ to know him, and the longer you live with him the more will you admire and adore him; yes, and the more will you receive from him, even

grace for grace. Truly he is a blessed Christ to one who is but a month old in grace; but these babes can hardly tell what a precious Jesus he is to those whose acquaintance with him covers well-nigh half a century! Jesus, in the esteem of abiding believers, grows sweeter and dearer, fairer and more lovely, day by day. Not that he improves in himself, for he is perfect; but that as we increase in our knowledge of him, we appreciate more thoroughly his matchless excellences. How glowingly do his old acquaintances exclaim, "Yea, he is altogether lovely"! Oh, that we may continue to grow up into him in all things who is our head, that we thus may prize him more and more!

I call your earnest attention to our text, begging you to consider with me three questions. First, *what is this special blessing?* "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Secondly, *how is this special blessing obtained?* "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." Then, thirdly, *why is it obtained in this way?* There must be a reason for the conditions laid down as needful to obtaining the promised power in prayer. Oh, that the anointing of the Holy Spirit which abideth on us may now make this subject very profitable to us!

I. WHAT IS THIS SPECIAL BLESSING? Let us read the verse again. Jesus says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Observe that our Lord had been warning us that, severed from him, we can do nothing, and, therefore, we might naturally have expected that he would now show us how we can do all spiritual acts. But the text does not run as we should have expected it to run. The Lord Jesus does not say, "Without me ye can do nothing, but, if ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall do all spiritual and gracious things." He does not now speak of what they should themselves be enabled to do, but of what should be done unto them: "it shall be done unto you." He says not, "Strength shall be given you sufficient for all those holy doings of which you are incapable apart from me." That would have been true enough, and it is the truth which we looked for here; but our most wise Lord improves upon all parallelisms of speech, and improves upon all expectancies of heart, and says something better still. He does not say, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall do spiritual things"; but, "ye shall ask." By prayer you shall be enabled to do; but before all attempts to do, "Ye shall ask." The choice privilege here given is a mighty prevailing prayerfulness. Power in prayer is very much the gauge of our spiritual condition; and when that is secured to us in a high degree, we are favoured as to all other matters.

One of the first results, then, of our abiding union with Christ will be *the certain exercise of prayer:* "Ye shall ask." If others neither seek, nor knock, nor ask, ye, at any rate, shall do so. Those who keep away from Jesus do not pray. Those in whom communion with Christ is suspended feel as if they could not pray; but Jesus says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask." Prayer comes spontaneously from those who abide in Jesus, even as certain oriental trees, without pressure, shed their fragrant gums. Prayer is

the natural outgushing of a soul in communion with Jesus. Just as the leaf and the fruit will come out of the vine-branch without any conscious effort on the part of the branch, but simply because of its living union with the stem, so prayer buds, and blossoms, and fruits out of souls abiding in Jesus. As stars shine, so do abiders pray. It is their use and their second nature. They do not say to themselves, "Now it is the time for us to get to our task and pray." No, they pray as wise men eat, namely, when the desire for it is upon them. They do not cry out as under bondage, "At this time I ought to be in prayer, but I do not feel like it. What a weariness it is!" but they have a glad errand at the mercy-seat, and they are rejoiced to go upon it. Hearts abiding in Christ send forth supplications as fires send out flames and sparks. Souls abiding in Jesus open the day with prayer; prayer surrounds them as an atmosphere all day long; at night they fall asleep praying. I have known them even dream a prayer, and, at any rate, they are able joyfully to say, "When I awake, I am still with thee." Habitual asking comes out of abiding in Christ. You will not need urging to prayer when you are abiding with Jesus: he says, "Ye shall ask"; and, depend upon it, you will.

You shall also feel most powerfully *the necessity of prayer*. Your great need of prayer will be vividly seen. Do I hear you say—"What! When we abide in Christ, and his words abide in us, have we not already attained?" Far are we, then, from being satisfied with ourselves; it is then that we feel more than ever that we must ask for more grace. He that knows Christ best, knows his own necessities best. He that is most conscious of life in Christ, is also most convinced of his own death apart from Christ. He who most clearly discerns the perfect character of Jesus, will be most urgent in prayer for grace to grow like him. The more I see to be in my Lord, the more I desire to obtain from him, since I know that all that is in him is put there on purpose that I may receive it. "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." It is just in proportion as we are linked to Christ's fulness that we feel the necessity of drawing from it by constant prayer. Nobody needs to prove to an abider in Christ the doctrine of prayer, for we enjoy the thing itself. Prayer is now as much a necessity of our spiritual life as breath is of our natural life: we cannot live without asking favours of the Lord. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye *shall* ask": and ye shall not wish to cease from asking. He hath said, "Seek ye my face," and your heart will answer, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

Note next, that the fruit of our abiding is not only the exercise of prayer, and a sense of the necessity of prayer, but it includes *liberty in prayer*: "Ye shall ask what ye will." Have you not been on your knees at times without power to pray? Have you not felt that you could not plead as you desired? You wanted to pray, but the waters were frozen up, and would not flow. You said, mournfully, "I am shut up, and cannot come forth." The will was present, but not the freedom to present that will in prayer. Do you, then, desire liberty in prayer, so that you may speak with God as a man speaketh with his friend? Here is the way to it: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." I do not mean that you will

gain liberty as to mere fluency of utterance, for that is a very inferior gift. Fluency is a questionable endowment, especially when it is not attended with weight of thought and depth of feeling. Some brethren pray by the yard; but true prayer is measured by weight, and not by length. A single groan before God may have more fulness of prayer in it than a fine oration of great length. He that dwells with God in Christ Jesus, he is the man whose steps are enlarged in intercession. He comes boldly because he abides at the throne. He sees the golden sceptre stretched out, and hears the King saying, "Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee." It is the man who abides in conscious union with his Lord who has freedom of access in prayer. Well may he come to Christ readily, for he is in Christ, and abides in him. Attempt not to seize this holy liberty by excitement, or presumption: there is but one way of really gaining it, and here it is—"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will." By this means alone shall you be enabled to open your mouth wide, that God may fill it. Thus shall you become Israels, and as princes have power with God.

This is not all: the favoured man has the privilege of *successful prayer*. "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." You may not do it, but it shall be done unto you. You long to bear fruit: ask, and it shall be done unto you. Look at the vine branch. It simply remains in the vine, and by remaining in the vine the fruit comes from it; it is done unto it. Brother in Christ, the purport of your being, its one object and design, is to bring forth fruit to the glory of the Father: to gain this end you must abide in Christ, as the branch abides in the vine. This is the method by which your prayer for fruitfulness will become successful, "it shall be done unto you." Concerning this matter, "you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." You shall have wonderful prevalence with God in prayer, insomuch that before you call he will answer, and while you are yet speaking he will hear. "The desire of the righteous shall be granted." To the same effect is the other text: "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." There is a great breadth in this text, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The Lord gives the abider *carte blanche*. He puts into his hand a signed cheque, and permits him to fill it up as he wills.

Does the text mean what it says? I never knew my Lord to say anything he did not mean. I am sure that he may sometimes mean more than we understand him to say, but he never means less. Mind you, he does not say to all men, "I will give you whatever you ask." Oh no, that would be an unkind kindness: but he speaks to his disciples, and says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." It is to a certain class of men who have already received great grace at his hands—it is to them he commits this marvellous power of prayer. O my dear friends, if I may covet earnestly one thing above every other, it is this; that I may be able to ask what I will of the Lord, and have it. The prevailer in prayer is the man to preach successfully, for he may well prevail with man for God when he has already prevailed with God for

men. This is the man to face the difficulties of business life; for what can baffle him when he can take all to God in prayer? One such man as this, or one such woman as this in a church, is worth ten thousand of us common people. In these we find the peerage of the skies. In these are the men in whom is fulfilled God's purpose concerning man, whom he made to have dominion over all the works of his hands. The stamp of sovereignty is on the brows of these men: they shape the history of nations, they guide the current of events through their power on high. We see Jesus with all things put under him by the divine purpose, and as we rise into that image, we also are clothed with dominion, and are made kings and priests unto God. Behold Elijah, with the keys of the rain swinging at his girdle: he shuts or opens the windows of heaven! There are such men still alive. Aspire to be such men and women, I beseech you, that to you the text may be fulfilled. "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

The text seems to imply that, if we reach this point of privilege, this gift shall be a perpetuity: "Ye shall ask," ye shall always ask; ye shall never get beyond asking, but ye shall ask successfully, for "ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Here we have the gift of *continual prayer*. Not for the week of prayer, not during a month's conference, nor upon a few special occasions shall ye pray prevailingly; but ye shall possess this power with God so long as you abide in Christ, and his words abide in you. God will put his omnipotence at your disposal: he will put forth his Godhead to fulfil the desires which his own Spirit has inwrought in you. I wish I could make this jewel glitter before the eyes of all the saints till they cried out, "Oh that we had it!" This power in prayer is like the sword of Goliath: wisely may every David say—"There is none like it; give it me." This weapon of all-prayer beats the enemy, and, at the same time, enriches its possessor with all the wealth of God. How can he lack anything to whom the Lord hath said, "Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee"? Oh, come, let us seek this boon. Listen, and learn the way. Follow me, while by the light of the text I point out the path. May the Lord lead us in it by his Holy Spirit!

II. The privilege of mighty prayerfulness—HOW IS IT TO BE OBTAINED? The answer is, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." Here are the two feet by which we climb to power with God in prayer.

Beloved, the first line tells us that we are to *abide in Christ Jesus our Lord*. It is taken for granted that we are already in him. May it be taken for granted in your case, dear hearer? If so, you are to abide where you are. As believers we are to remain tenaciously clinging to Jesus, livingly knit to Jesus. We are to abide in him, by always trusting him, and him only, with the same simple faith which joined us to him at the first. We must never admit any other thing or person into our heart's confidence as our hope of salvation, but rest alone in Jesus as we received him at the first. His Godhead, his manhood, his life, his death, his resurrection, his glory at the right hand of the Father—in a word, himself must be our heart's sole

reliance. This is absolutely essential. A temporary faith will not save: an abiding faith is needful.

But abiding in the Lord Jesus does not only mean trusting in him; it includes our yielding ourselves up to him to receive his life, and to let that life work out its results in us. We live *in* him, *by* him, *for* him, *to* him, when we abide in him. We feel that all our separate life has gone: for "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ." We are nothing if we get away from Jesus; we should then be branches withered, and fit only to be cast into the fire. We have no reason for existence except that which we find in Christ; and what a marvellous reason that is! The vine needs the branch as truly as the branch needs the vine. No vine ever bore any fruit except upon its branches. Truly it bears all the branches, and so bears all the fruit; but yet it is by the branch that the vine displays its fruitfulness. Thus are abiding believers needful to the fulfilment of their Lord's design. Wonderful thing to say; but the saints are needful to their Saviour! The church is his body; the fulness of him that filleth all in all. I want you to recognize this, that you may see your blessed responsibility, your practical obligation to bring forth fruit, that the Lord Jesus may be glorified in you. Abide in him. Never remove from your consecration to his honour and glory. Never dream of being your own master. Be not the servant of men, but abide in Christ. Let him be the object, as well as the source, of your existence. Oh, if you get there, and stop there in perpetual communion with your Lord, you will soon realize a joy, a delight, a power in prayer, such as you never knew before. There are times when we are conscious that we are in Christ, and we know our fellowship with him; and oh, the joy and the peace which we drink from this cup! Let us abide there. "Abide in me," saith Jesus. You are not to come and go, but to abide. Let that blessed sinking of yourself into his life, the spending of all your powers for Jesus, and the firm faith of your union with him remain in you evermore. Oh, that we might attain to this by the Holy Ghost!

As if to help us to understand this, our gracious Lord has given us a delightful parable. Let us look through this discourse of the vine and its branches. Jesus says, "Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it." Take care that you *abide in Christ when you are being purged.* "Oh," says one, "I thought I was a Christian; but, alas! I have more troubles than ever: men ridicule me, the devil tempts me, and my business affairs go wrong." Brother, if you are to have power in prayer you must take care that you abide in Christ when the sharp knife is cutting everything away. Endure trial, and never dream of giving up your faith because of it. Say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Your Lord warned you when you first came into the vine that you would have to be purged and cut closely; and if you are now feeling the purging process, you must not think that some strange thing hath happened unto you. Rebel not because of anything you may have to suffer from the dear hand of your heavenly Father, who is the husbandman of the vineyard. No, but cling to Jesus all the more closely. Say, "Cut, Lord, cut to the quick if thou wilt; but I will cling to thee. To whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Yes, cling to Jesus when the

purging knife is in his hand, and so "shall ye ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

Take care, also, that *when the purging operation has been carried out you still cleave to your Lord.* Notice the third verse: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you." Abide after cleansing where you were before cleansing. When you are sanctified, abide where you were when first justified. When you see the work of the Spirit increasing in you, do not let the devil tempt you to boast that now you are somebody, and need not come to Jesus as a poor sinner, and rest in his precious blood alone for salvation. Abide still in Jesus. As you kept to him when the knife cut you, keep to him now that the tender grapes begin to form. Do not say to yourself, "What a fruitful branch I am! How greatly I adorn the vine! Now I am full of vigour!" You are nothing and nobody. Only as you abide in Christ are you one whit better than the waste wood which is burned in the fire. "But do we not make progress?" Yes, we grow, but we abide: we never go an inch further, we abide in him; or, if not, we are cast forth, and are withered. Our whole hope lies in Jesus at our best times as well as at our worst. Jesus saith, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you."

Abide in him *as to all your fruitfulness.* "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." "Here, then, I have something to do," cries one. Certainly you have, but not apart from Jesus. The branch has to bear fruit; but if the branch imagines that it is going to produce a cluster, or even a grape, out of itself alone, it is utterly mistaken. The fruit of the branch must come forth of the stem. Your work for Christ must be Christ's work in you, or else it will be good for nothing. I pray you, see to this. Your Sunday-school teaching, your preaching, or whatever you do, must be done in Christ Jesus. Not by your natural talent can you win souls, nor by plans of your own inventing can you save men. Beware of home-made schemes. Do for Jesus what Jesus bids you do. Remember that our work for Christ, as we call it, must be Christ's work first, if it is to be accepted of him. Abide in him as to your fruit-bearing.

Yea, abide in him *as to your very life.* Do not say, "I have been a Christian man now twenty or thirty years, I can do without continued dependence upon Christ." No, you could not do without him if you were as old as Methuselah. Your very being as a Christian depends upon your still clinging, still trusting, still depending; and this he must give you, for it all comes from him, and him alone. To sum it all up, if you want that splendid power in prayer of which I spoke just now, you must remain in loving, living, lasting, conscious, practical, abiding union with the Lord Jesus Christ; and if you get to that by divine grace, then you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.

But there is a second qualification mentioned in the text, and you must not forget it—"*and my words abide in you.*" How important, then, are Christ's words! He said in the fourth verse, "Abide in me, and I in you," and now as a parallel to this it is, "If ye abide in me,

and my words abide in you." What, then, are Christ's words and himself identical? Yes, practically so. Some talk about Christ being the Master, but as to doctrine, they do not care what his word declares. So long as their hearts are right towards his person they claim liberty of thought. Ay, but this is a mere subterfuge. We cannot separate Christ from the Word; for, in the first place, he is the Word; and, in the next place, how dare we call him Master and Lord and do not the things which he says, and reject the truth which he teaches? We must obey his precepts or he will not accept us as disciples. Especially that precept of love which is the essence of all his words. We must love God and our brethren; yea, we must cherish love to all men, and seek their good. Anger and malice must be far from us. We must walk even as he walked. If Christ's words abide not in thee, both as to belief and practice, thou art not in Christ. Christ and his gospel and his commands are one. If thou wilt not have Christ and his words, neither will he have thee nor thy words; but thou shalt ask in vain, thou shalt by-and-by give up asking, thou shalt become as a withered branch. Beloved, I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

Oh for grace to pass through these two-leaved gates, these two golden doors! "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you." Push through the two, and enter into this large room—"Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

III. It is my last work to try to show WHY THIS PRIVILEGE SHOULD BE SO OBTAINED. This extraordinary power of prayer, why is it given to those who abide in Christ? May what I have to say encourage you to make the glorious attempt to win this pearl of great price! Why is it, that by abiding in Christ, and having his words abide in us, we get to this liberty and prevalence in prayer?

I answer, first, *because of the fulness of Christ.* You may very well ask what you will when you abide in Christ, because whatsoever you may require is already lodged in him. Good Bishop Hall worked out this thought in a famous passage. I will give you the substance of it. Do you desire the grace of the Spirit? Go to your Lord's anointing. Do you seek holiness? Go to his example. Do you desire pardon of sin? Look to his blood. Do you need mortification of sin? Look to his crucifixion. Do you need to be buried to the world? Go to his tomb. Do you want to feel the fulness of a heavenly life? Behold his resurrection. Would you rise above the world? Mark his ascension. Would you contemplate heavenly things? Remember his session at the right hand of God, and know that he "hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places." I see clearly enough why the branch gets all it wants while it abides in the stem, since all it wants is already in the stem, and is placed there for the sake of the branch. What does the branch want more than the stem can give it? If it did want more it could not get it; for it has no other means of living but by sucking its life out of the stem. O my precious Lord, if I want anything which is not in thee, I desire always to be without it. I desire to be denied a wish which wanders outside of thyself. But if the supply of my desire is already in thee for me, why should I go elsewhere? Thou art my all; where else should I

look? Beloved, "it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell," and the good pleasure of the Father is our good pleasure also: we are glad to draw everything from Jesus. We feel sure that, ask what we will, we shall have it, since he has it ready for us.

The next reason for this is, *the richness of the Word of God.* Catch this thought, "If my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." The best praying man is the man who is most believingly familiar with the promises of God. After all, prayer is nothing but taking God's promises to him, and saying to him, "Do as thou hast said." Prayer is the promise utilized. A prayer which is not based on a promise has no true foundation. If I go to the bank without a cheque I need not expect to get money; it is the "order to pay" which is my power inside the bank, and my warrant for expecting to receive. You that have Christ's words abiding in you are equipped with those things which the Lord regards with attention. If the Word of God abideth in you, you are the man that can pray, because you meet the great God with his own words, and thus overcome omnipotence with omnipotence. You put your finger down upon the very lines, and say, "Do as thou hast said." This is the best praying in all the world. O beloved, be filled with God's Word. Study what Jesus has said, what the Holy Ghost has left on record in this divinely-inspired Book, and in proportion as you feed on the Word, and are filled with the Word, and retain the Word in your faith, and obey the Word in your life—in that proportion you will be a master-man in the art of prayer. You have acquired skill as a wrestler with the covenant angel in proportion as you can plead the promises of your faithful God. Be well instructed in the doctrines of grace, and let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, that you may know how to prevail at the throne of grace. Abiding in Christ, and his words abiding in you, are like the right hand and the left hand of Moses, which were held up in prayer, so that Amalek was smitten, Israel was delivered, and God was glorified.

Let us go a little further: you still may say you do not quite see why a man who abides in Christ, and in whom Christ's words abide, should be allowed to ask whatever he wills, and it shall be done unto him. I answer you again: it is so, because *in such a man as that there is a predominance of grace which causes him to have a renewed will, which is according to the will of God.* Suppose a man of God is in prayer, and he thinks that such and such a thing is desirable, yet he remembers that he is nothing but a babe in the presence of his all-wise Father, and so he bows his will, and asks as a favour to be taught what to will. Though God bids him ask what he wills, he shrinks and cries, "My Lord, here is a request which I am not quite clear about. As far as I can judge, it is a desirable thing, and I will it; but, Lord, I am not fit to judge for myself, and therefore I pray thee, give not as I will, but as thou wilt." Do you not see that, when we are in such a condition as this, our real will is God's will. Deep down in our hearts we will only that which the Lord himself wills; and what is this but to ask what we will, and it is done to us? It becomes safe for God to say to the sanctified soul, "Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee." The heavenly instincts of that man lead him

right; the grace that is within his soul thrusts down all covetous lustings and foul desires, and his will is the actual shadow of God's will. The spiritual life is master in him, and so his aspirations are holy, heavenly, Godlike. He has been made a partaker of the divine nature; and as a son is like his father, so now in desire and will he is one with his God. As the echo answers to the voice, so does the renewed heart echo the mind of the Lord. Our desires are reflected beams of the divine will: ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be even so.

You clearly see that the holy God cannot pick up a common man in the street, and say to him, "I will give you whatsoever you will." What would he ask for? He would ask for a good drink, or permission to enjoy himself in evil lust. It would be very unsafe to trust the most of men with this permit. But when the Lord has taken a man, and has new-made him, has quickened him into newness of life, and has formed him in the image of his dear Son, then he can trust him! Behold, the great Father treats us in our measure as he treats his Firstborn. Jesus could say, "I know that thou hearest me always"; and the Lord is educating us to the selfsame assurance. We can say with one of old, "My God will hear me." Do not your mouths water for this privilege of prevailing prayer? Do not your hearts long to get at this? It is by the way of holiness, it is by the way of union to Christ, it is by the way of a permanent abiding in him, and an obedient holding fast of his truth, that you are to come to this privilege. Behold the only safe and true way. When once that way is really trodden, it is a most sure and effectual way of gaining substantial power in prayer.

I have not quite done. A man will succeed in prayer *when his faith is strong;* and this is the case with those who abide in Jesus. It is faith that prevails in prayer. The real eloquence of prayer is a believing desire. "All things are possible to him that believeth." A man abiding in Christ with Christ's words abiding in him, is eminently a believer, and consequently eminently successful in prayer. He has strong faith indeed, for his faith has brought him into vital contact with Christ, and he is therefore at the source of every blessing, and may drink to his full at the well itself.

Such a man, once more, will also possess *the indwelling of the Spirit of God.* If we abide in Christ, and his words abide in us, then the Holy Ghost has come and taken up his residence in us; and what better help in prayer can we have? Is it not a wonderful thing that the Holy Ghost himself maketh intercession in the saints according to the will of God? He "maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." What man knoweth the mind of a man save the spirit of a man? The Spirit of God knows the mind of God, and he works in us to will what God wills, so that a believing man's prayer is God's purpose reflected in the soul as in a mirror. The eternal decrees of God project their shadows over the hearts of godly men in the form of prayer. What God intends to do he tells unto his servants by inclining them to ask him to do what he himself is resolved to do. God says, "I will do this and that"; but then he adds, "For this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it

for them." How clear it is that if we abide in Christ, and his words abide in us, we may ask what we will! For we shall only ask what the Spirit of God moves us to ask; and it were impossible that God the Holy Ghost and God the Father should be at cross-purposes with one another. What the one prompts us to ask, the other has assuredly determined to bestow.

I struck out a line just now to which I must return for a single moment. Beloved, do you not know that when we abide in Christ, and his words abide in us, the Father looks upon us with the same eye with which he looks upon his dear Son? Christ is the vine, and the vine includes the branches. The branches are a part of the vine. God, therefore, looks upon us as part of Christ—members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Such is the Father's love to Jesus that he denies him nothing. He was obedient to death, even the death of the cross; therefore doth his Father love him, as the God-man Mediator, and he will grant him all his petitions. And is it so, that when you and I are in real union to Christ, the Lord God looks upon us in the same way as he looks on Jesus, and says to us, "I will deny you nothing; ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"? So do I understand the text.

I call your attention to the fact that in that fifteenth chapter, the ninth verse, which I did not read this morning, runs thus:—"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." The same love which God gives to his Son, the Son gives to us; and therefore we are dwellers in the love of the Father and of the Son. How can our prayers be rejected? Will not infinite love have respect unto our petitions? O dear brother in Christ, if thy prayers speed not at the throne, suspect that there is some sin that hinders them: thy Father's love sees a necessity for chastening thee this way. If thou dost not abide in Christ, how canst thou hope to pray successfully? If thou dost pick and choose his words, and doubt this, and doubt that, how canst thou hope to speed at the throne? If thou art wilfully disobedient to any one of his words, will not this account for failure in prayer? But abide thou in Christ, and take fast hold upon his words, and be altogether his disciple, then shalt thou be heard of him. Sitting at Jesus' feet, hearing his words, thou mayest lift up thine eyes to his dear face, and say, "My Lord, hear me now"; and he will answer thee graciously: he will say unto thee, "I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee. Ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee." Oh for power at the mercy-seat!

Beloved friends, do not hear this sermon, and then go away and forget it. Do try to reach this place of boundless influence. What a church we should be, if you were all mighty in prayer! Dear children of God, do you want to be half starved? Beloved brethren, do you desire to be poor, little, puny, drivelling children, who will never grow into men? I pray you, aspire to be strong in the Lord, and to enjoy this exceedingly high privilege. What an army would you be if you all had this power with God in prayer! It is within your reach, ye children of God! Only abide in Christ, and let his words abide in you, and then this special privilege will be yours. These are not

irksome duties, but they are in themselves a joy. Go in for them with your whole heart, and then you shall get this added to you, that you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.

Unhappily, to a portion of this congregation my text says nothing at all; for some of you are not even in Christ, and therefore you cannot abide in him. O sirs, what shall I say to you? You seem to me to miss a very heaven even now. If there were no hell hereafter, it is hell enough not to know Christ now, not to know what it is to prevail with God in prayer, not to know the choice privilege of abiding in him, and his words abiding in you. Your first matter is that you believe in Jesus Christ to the saving of your souls, yielding your souls to his cleansing, your lives to his government. God hath sent him forth as a Saviour, accept him. Receive him as your Teacher; yield yourself up to him as your Master. May his gracious Spirit come and do this work upon you now; and then, after this, but not before, you may aspire to this honour. First of all—"Ye must be born again." I cannot say to you as you are now, "Grow," because you will only grow a bigger sinner. However much you may be developed, you will only develop what is in you: and that is, the heir of wrath will become more and more the child of evil. You must be made anew in Christ: there must be an absolute change, a reversal of all the currents of nature, a making you a new creature in Christ Jesus; and then you may aspire to abide in Christ, and let his words abide in you, and the consequent prevalence with God in prayer shall be yours.

Gracious Lord, help us this morning. Poor creatures as we are, we can only lie at thy feet. Come thyself, and uplift us to thyself, for thy mercy's sake! Amen.

The Candle

"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"—Matthew v. 15, 16.

OUR Saviour was speaking of the influence of his disciples upon their fellows, and he first of all mentioned that secret but powerful influence which he describes under the figure of salt: "Ye are the salt of the earth." No sooner is a man born unto God than he begins to affect his fellow-men with an influence which is rather felt than seen. The very existence of a believer operates upon unbelievers. He is like a handful of salt cast upon flesh; he has a savour in himself, and this begins to penetrate those who are in contact with him. The unobserved, and almost unconscious influence of a holy life is most effectual to the conserving of society and the prevention of moral putrefaction. May there be salt in every one of us, for "salt is good." Have salt in yourselves, and then you will become a blessing to all around you.

But there is about every true Christian a manifest and visible influence which he is bound to exercise, and this our Lord sets forth under the figure of light: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." In any case the genuine Christian will exercise the silent and unseen salting influence upon those who come into immediate contact with him; but let him also labour to possess the second, or illuminating influence, which covers a far larger area, and deals more with real life; for salt is for dead flesh, and light for living men. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Saltness and light are the power of a Christian. I do not believe that any man will give forth light if he has not first received salt; and yet some have a measure of salt who are none too liberal with their light. May God grant us grace to balance the inward and the outward. May we have the conserving salt and the diffusive light. Our thoughts will now run towards light-giving, and I pray that I may be helped to move the more retiring and less active among us to exert their influence upon others to a greater

extent; to crown the silent testimonies of their humble faith by an outspoken witness-bearing for their Lord and Saviour. All who have salt will now be urged to show their light.

The figure which our Saviour uses is a homely one, borrowed from the eastern tent and house. He speaks of a candle, or, more accurately, of a lamp. We should read the passage—"Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the bushel, but on the lampstand, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." I shall use the figure both in its eastern and in its western dress, and sometimes we will make a lamp of it and sometimes a candle. Perhaps we shall see all the better with both a lamp and a candle; and, though we may confuse the metaphor, we shall not confuse anybody's mind upon the important truth which it sets forth.

Three things are in the text. The first is *the lighting*, the second is *the placing*, and the third is *the shining*. The first two are both intended to produce the third. May he who alone can create light illuminate our minds while dwelling on his word.

I. First let us consider THE LIGHTING. "Neither do men light a candle." What is this lighting up of the souls of men? They are without light by nature, "having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them." What, then, is this lighting?

It is, first of all, *a divine work*. God began his creating work of old by saying, "Let there be light," and there was light. And as in the old creation so in the new, the first thing that God worketh in the heart of man is light: "the entrance of thy word giveth light." Well said David, "The Lord is my light and my salvation." The Holy Spirit enlightens the understanding, so that the man perceives the desperateness of his own condition, and his inability to win salvation by his own works. The Lord pours light into the soul, so that Christ is seen by faith, and at the sight of him the heart catches fire, and light takes hold upon the inner man, so that he not only sees light but has light. The light not only shines upon the heart but from the heart. "Ye were sometime darkness,"—not only in the dark, but darkness,—"but now are ye light in the Lord": not only have ye light from the Lord, but ye *are* light, your souls having caught the flame. The Holy Spirit alone can accomplish this work. No human being will ever have light within himself till God who spoke the fiat at creation shall by the selfsame word create light in the soul. The apostle Paul says of all the saints, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

This lighting is *a separating* work. When this light comes it separates a man from those around him who are as the darkness. It does not take him away from his surroundings, it does not shut him up in a monastery, but the separation is complete; for to set a division between a candle and the darkness all that is wanted is to light it. The tiniest spark will by its very existence be distinguished from the darkness. There is no need to label light to prevent its being confounded with the darkness, and there is no need for it to sound a trumpet before itself, saying, "Here am I." What fellowship hath light with darkness? No sooner cometh the light into a man's heart than he is separate from

those who are round about him, called by the grace of God by a vocation which at once sets a difference between the called ones and the rest of the sons of men. The darkness could not have created the light, for it does not even comprehend it, "the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Those that are round about the Christian man cannot make him out, for his life is hid with Christ in God. At his conversion they perceive that a strange alteration had come over him; and, as Dr. Watts says, they "gaze and admire, and hate the change"; but they know no more about it than owls do of the sun. At first they set the change down to melancholy, until the man's experience flashes into delight, and then they call it fanaticism or a kind of madness, a sort of twist of the mind. Oh, blessed twist! Would God that those who know it not could be twisted after the same fashion! It is the kindling of the candle, so that where all was darkness before there may now be the heavenly light.

The darkness, though it does not understand or love the light, is nevertheless compelled to yield to it; for the battle between light and darkness is short and decisive. Up to the measure of the light is the measure of its conquest. Though only a few beams should irradiate the eastern sky, yet so far the arrows of the sun have pierced the heart of the night; and as that light shall glow into high noon all trace of darkness must fly before it. Beloved, if God has given light to us, he has put within us a principle that shall go forth conquering and to conquer. Let the darkness be as dense as that which plagued the Egyptians, yet must it yield to light. A conflict is to be expected, but a conquest is guaranteed. We must not dream that the darkness will put forth its black arms to embrace our light; nor may we imagine that it will come cowering at the foot of our candlestick and ask to make a league with us. Light cannot dwell side by side with the darkness, making covenant therewith, for it is written, "God divided the light from the darkness, and God called the light day, and the darkness he called night," thus giving to each its own distinguishing name, that none might confound them. No man shall ever be able to mingle the two: they are and must be for ever distinct. To the end of time there shall be two seeds, the heirs of light and the children of darkness, and these two cannot be one. The light shall war with the darkness till the eternal light hath fully risen and reached its zenith, and then the earth shall be filled with the light of the glory of God. Till then, ye children of light, see to it that ye have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. This lighting up of the candle takes place at regeneration, and you perceive it in enlightenment, conviction, conversion. The question is, have you ever been lit, dear friend? Have you ever received that divine light? Have you ever felt the touch of the heavenly torch of the word by which light has come to you, and now dwells within you, so that you yourself have become a light, and are shining to the glory of God?

Furthermore, this light giving is *a personal work to every man* who is the subject of it. The text says, "Let *your* light so shine before men." When a man lights a candle the light does not belong to the candle originally; but when once the candle has accepted the flame the light becomes the candle's own light, and the candle begins to shine by its own

light. So, beloved, the grace of God, the light from heaven, must come to each one of us individually from the divine hand, and we must personally receive it. Light is not inherent in any one of us, and therefore it must be bestowed. Its bestowal necessitates a personal acceptance. It is not bestowed upon us as part of a nation or family. In its enlightening operations grace does not deal with men in the gross, but with each man by himself. Sin is personal, and so must grace be. We are individually in the darkness, and must be individually kindled into light. One by one each man must accept the light, permitting it, as it were, to kindle upon him, so that the very wick of his being, that innermost life which goes through the very centre of his nature, shall embrace the flame and begin to burn with it. There must be an individual appropriation of the light, so that to each one of you it becomes your own. "Let *your* light so shine before men." Do not deceive yourselves with the notion of national Christianity or hereditary Christianity; the only true religion is personal godliness. We cannot light these candles by the pound at a time, nor heap up lamps in a pile and light them in a mass. We have nowadays wonderful lights, which can be all lit in an instant by a single touch of electricity; but even then each one of the lights has to receive a flame for itself, which becomes all its own. There is no way by which individuality can be destroyed and men saved *en masse*.

In each man the light is peculiar and distinct. The light that burns in one true minister of Christ is the same which shines forth from another, and yet one star differeth from another star in glory: Peter is not John, Paul is not James, Whitefield is not Wesley. You shall examine the whole range of God's lamps and candlesticks and you shall not find two exactly alike. Many artists exhaust themselves and then repeat themselves; but God is inexhaustibly original; no two touches of his pencil are the same. Light is one, and its glory is one, and yet there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars. There is a difference in the lights of various oils and gases, and so there is in your light, my brother, and my light. It is very possible that you would like to put my candle in order; you may do so if you can, but do not snuff me out. Your own light is, however, your main concern, and you had better ask for special grace that it may not fail. Your light is distinct from mine, as distinct as your life is from mine, though in another sense it is true that your spiritual light is one with all the light that ever shone in this world. There is in the lighting a personal appropriation of the divine flame, and afterwards a personal and distinct sending forth of the sacred light in the individual's own way. Look ye well to this, lest ye be mistaken, and suppose yourselves to be lighted from heaven when you are the mere will-o'-the-wisps of delusion.

I like our translators reading the word candle—"Neither do men light a candle," for nowadays a candle is the smallest of all lights. We almost despise a candle in these days of the electric light; yet small lights are useful, and tiny lamps have their sphere. God has many small lights; in his great house he has candles as well as stars, and he would not have even a small light wasted. Even the most twinkling ray of light is of God's kindling: think of that, you who cannot do more than talk to a child or give away a tract for love of his dear name.

You are a little light, but if the Lord has given you even a spark of the sacred fire he means that you should shine. In this world there are many lights, but none too many. We could not spare the sun, and it would be a calamity if the smallest star were quenched. We cannot spare those modern inventions which so cheer us by turning our city's night into day; but I wot we should miss even the glowworm from its dewy haunt in the quiet lane. We cannot afford to lose a ray of light in this misty, foggy, all-beclouded sky of ours. The church and the world need all the light that has been vouchsafed, and much more. I, therefore, would press upon all my brethren and sisters here who may happen to have but one talent the necessity of their putting it out to interest. Your light, my friend, may be but a farthing rushlight, but you must not hide it, for all lights are of God, and are sent with a kind and gracious purpose by the great Father of lights.

Note further, that lighting *is a work which needs sustaining*. Whilst lighting is a process performed in a moment, it is also, as a matter of fact, prolonged; for the lamp needs to be trimmed, and it would be ill to light a lamp and leave it to itself. The lamp must have fresh oil from time to time, since by shining it consumes its fuel. Do not any of you, therefore, think if you can fix upon a certain time and say, "I was converted then," that you may live as you like afterwards. God forbid! The saints prove their conversion by their perseverance, and that perseverance comes from a continual supply of divine grace to their souls. Judge ye, then, yourselves by this, not so much whether on a certain special occasion you were turned from darkness to light, but are you still "light in the Lord"? Have you oil in your vessels with your lamps? Are you looking unto Jesus? It was well that you looked; but are you looking? for that is the great thing. Remember, it is a present business—looking. It is well that you came to Jesus, but that is merely the beginning; it is "to whom coming," coming continually, as unto a living stone. Our lungs must have, as we all know, fresh supplies of air. It will avail me nothing that I breathed yesterday; I am dead, unless I breathe to-day. We must have constant food: you ate yesterday; but could you without hunger and weakness go without to-day? We continually need to be built up as to our bodies, and it is just the same with our souls, and if we neglect this, if we fancy that something done twenty years ago is all that is wanted, we shall make a great mistake. There must be the frequent trimming of the lamp, which is, in effect, a continuation of the lighting.

Once again, let me say that this work of lighting is a work which when it is done upon a man *consecrates him entirely to the service of light giving*. A candle once lit, if it continues alight will be all consumed in giving light. It is what it was made for, not to be laid by in a glass case and looked at, but to be burned away. Blessed is the man who can say, "My zeal hath consumed me." You will say that in the case of the lamp the lamp itself is not consumed. No, but it is consecrated to the one purpose of lighting the house, and it contains the supply of oil by which the flame is fed. The whole of the lamp, whether it be of gold or silver or clay, or whatever it may be, is dedicated to the one purpose of giving light: and if God ever comes and lights you, my dear brother, you are henceforth separated from all

other purposes, and appointed to the one calling. You may be a great many other things according to your human calling, but these must be subordinate. I wish that some men kept earthly things much more subordinate than they do. The first thing in a Christian is his Christianity. The chief business of one whom God has called is that he should live as the elect of God. Look at Christ Jesus, he was a carpenter, but I confess I seldom think of him as such: it is as the Saviour of men, and the servant of God that he comes before my mind. Even thus a Christian man ought so to live if he be a carpenter that the Christian swallows up the carpenter; and if he be a business man, or a man of letters, or an orator, he ought so to live that the most conspicuous fact about him is that he is a Christian. He is a lamp, and his one business is to shine. You may use a candle for many purposes; I saw a man grease a saw with one the other day, and another made his boots fit for walking in the snow in like manner; but still these are not the objects for which a candle is designed: it has missed the object of its existence if it does not give light. I suppose on occasions you might use a lamp for a weight, or for some other purposes; but it would not be the fit instrument for any purpose except that of giving light. Every thing is best when fulfilling its proper purpose. Have you ever seen a swan out of water? How ungainly is his walk! What an unwieldly bird he seems! But see him on the water. What a fine model for a ship! What grace! What beauty! So is it with the Christian, his beauty is best seen in his proper element; give him any other aim and he is awkward and uncomely. When seeking to instruct and save his fellow man, he is where God would have him, and then all the lines of creating wisdom, and all the beauties of divine grace are manifested in him. Let us take care then about this lighting, that it be lighting from above, that it be a lighting such as makes the light our own, and that it be a lighting which takes possession of us, and consecrates us entirely, and is perpetually sustained by the visitation of the Spirit of God. So much on that first point.

II. We will now, in the second place, consider THE PLACING. "No man lighteth a candle and putteth it under a bushel." It is a great point this placing of a man—it may hide his light or send it further afield. The chief matter is the lighting him, and getting him to have light to give; but the next most important thing is where to put him when he is alight. For some men when they first find Christ are in the wrong place altogether. How can a lamp shine if it be dropped into a river? After the conversion of certain persons their removal becomes necessary. It is significant that when God called Abraham he did not let him stop in Ur of the Chaldees: the place for Abraham to shine was not even in Haran; but he must get into the chosen country and wander as a shepherd prince, for only there and in that character could Abraham shine to the glory of God. Most men will be wise to stay where they are and shine; but others must undergo a great change of position before they will be able to scatter their light to the extent which the Lord intends for them. That may account, my friend, for your having more trouble since you were converted than you ever had before. You have been left to lie still till now, but you are wanted, and so you are fetched out from your hiding. It did not matter where you were when you

gave no light, you were just as well behind a box or in a closet as anywhere else: but now that you are lighted you must be put on a lamp-stand, and hence you are undergoing processes of providence that are somewhat painful to you. Our placing, whether it has necessitated removal or not, is largely done by the providence of God: one man is placed here and another there, and it is well for us to look at our position from this point of view. God puts us where we can best serve his cause and bless our age. If you had your choice, perhaps, if you had to be a street lamp, you would like to be a lamp in Hyde Park, to shine upon the nobles who pass that way. But the poor souls want lights far more down that blind alley, down that den of a court, where wild Irish are quarrelling, or drunkards murdering their wives. He that loves God, if he had his choice, might sooner choose to shine in the worse place than in the better. "Oh, that I lived in the midst of a warm-hearted church!" says one. If you are an earnest, thorough-going man, I am glad that you are placed in that dreary village where the people are pretty nearly starved for spiritual life. "What," cries one, "glad that I have to suffer so much?" No, not for that, but because if you are a strong man, you will not suffer, but you will make other people suffer; that is to say, make it hard for the minister, and the deacons, and the church to remain in their wretched condition of lukewarmness. I hope you will be the means of arousing them, and bringing them nearer to Christ. How often a place which appears undesirable will become desirable if we regard it in this light. Providence puts us where we can give the most light, and if our lamp is set up in the midst of darkness, where else should it be? This Tabernacle reminds me of those frames on wheels, filled with lamps, which are used at our railway stations; here we have scores of lamps all burning together, and when first one and then another is dropped through the roof into a carriage and whisked away along the line, though it be to Australia, or America, or India, I am sorry to lose you, but I am glad that you are going where you will do more good than you will do here. Why should you not be scattered abroad like the first believers? Why should not the candles be carried where the darkness is? Why should we keep up an everlasting illumination upon this particular spot, just to gladden our own eyes, instead of lending light to all the world? It is ours to say to others, "There is a candle, let it shine in your houses"; or, "Here is a lamp, set it up in your tents, that God may bless you thereby."

But though I have thus spoken of Providence, a good deal of our placing is in our own hands. There are ways of placing yourselves—for instance, that mentioned in the text, which may be as ruinous to our influence as if a candle were placed under a bushel; or you can put yourself in a place of advantage, as when a lamp is set upon a lamp-stand.

First, note the word in *the negative*—"Neither do men place it under a bushel." A bushel is a good and useful article. In almost every eastern house there was a corn-measure, here called a bushel, though it did not generally measure much more than a peck; this measure was commonly in every house, because they ground their own corn, and so were generally dealing with the neighbours. That useful corn-measure to me represents the pursuits of ordinary life—the proper and natural

avocations of the household. Many men and women hide the candle that God has lit under the bushel of business and domestic cares. But you ask, Is not a housewife to be a housewife? Certainly; but not so a housewife as to conceal her godliness. Is not the labouring man to work with his hands? Certainly, but not so to work for the bread that perisheth as to miss life eternal. Is not the man of business to give his best attention thereto? Of course he is, but he must see to it that he do not lose his own soul, or injure the souls of others. Keep your bushel; nobody asks you to burn it; but do keep it in its place. Subordinate all worldly things to the glory of God. Suffer not your possessions or your desires, your pleasures or your cares to act as a bushel hiding his light. This happens with a great many. I must ask conscience to be so kind as to preach for me for a minute or two. Will you look at home, dear friends, and see where you place your business and your religion? Which is uppermost? Which is foremost? Is religion your business, or is business your religion? Does your candle shine upon the bushel, or does the bushel hide the candle? I will not dwell upon the question, because it will be well for you to answer it in quiet, each man for himself. I know how a minister can put his light under a bushel—he can be a mere official and perform service, being nothing more than a performer. The worst thing to do with the gospel is to *parsonificate* it. As soon as we preach as mere officials we have lost all power: we must speak as men to men. A brother minister one day said to me, "The moment I shut the pulpit door I shut out my natural self." This will never do: a man must be all there when he is serving God, and if ever he is himself it must be in preaching. We can also cover the candle by using hard words, words which are not hard to educated people, but to the bulk of our hearers. We can also use technical creed words, such as we might use in the class room or in the discussion hall, and these may conceal our meaning from the people. I know some Christians who put their light under a bushel by being excessively bashful, and shamefaced. They are not so dreadfully retiring when five-pound notes are to be made; but if anything is to be said for Christ then they blush and stammer. Oh that they could overcome this hindrance. Others put their light under a bushel by inconsistency: they do not act as Christians should act, and when people see their bad works they do not glorify God. God forbid that in the house our darkness should be more conspicuous than our light. Some, I fear, cover their light under the bushel of indifference: they do not seem to care how things go with the cause and kingdom of Christ. They look well to the state of their flocks and herds, but for the house of the Lord they have small concern. I pray you, dear friends, do not hide your light in any way. Let not your lawful callings, your relationships, your sicknesses, your literary pursuits, or your personal sorrows become so exaggerated as to conceal the divine light within your soul.

The text is, however, *positive*. Put yourself on a candlestick or on a lampstand. What must that be? A candlestick is an appropriate exhibitor of the light; and each man should make an appropriate confession of his faith. The best way is prescribed in God's word. It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Take care that when you have faith you declare it in the ordained manner; for

he that with his heart believeth and with his mouth maketh confession of him shall be saved. O lamp, do not say, "I will shine, but I will lie upon the floor and do it." No, your place is on the stand which is provided. Dear Christian friend, join the church that you may be placed where you will be in order with the arrangements of the divine household. A lamp-stand should also be something which makes the lamp sufficiently visible. If you do not come out and diffuse your light willingly and cheerfully it is very likely the master of the house will fetch you out. Providence will arrange that the light shall not be hidden. See what the Lord did for his church years ago; he allowed her to be persecuted into publicity. What a lamp-stand was found for Christianity in the martyrdoms of the Colosseum, in the public burnings by pagans and papists, and in all the other modes by which believers in Christ were forced into fame. When there was no printing-press, when there were scanty opportunities of making the gospel public compared with those of to-day, the Lord caused his witnesses to stand before rulers and kings, and there publish in the most public places the word of his salvation. Persecution built the lighthouse, and the divine love set up aloft the burning and shining light of sacred truth. You may find that God will make such a candlestick for you. You shall be forced into testimony in your family by the opposition of those about you, unless you take other and happier methods. We ought to be valiant for the truth, and speak of it with all prudence, but without stint.

I long for the day when the precepts of the Christian religion shall be the rule among all classes of men, in all transactions. I often hear it said "Do not bring religion into politics." This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick. I would have the Cabinet and the Members of Parliament do the work of the nation as before the Lord, and I would have the nation, either in making war or peace, consider the matter by the light of righteousness. We are to deal with other nations about this or that upon the principles of the New Testament. I thank God that I have lived to see the attempt made in one or two instances, and I pray that the principle may become dominant and permanent. We have had enough of clever men without conscience, let us now see what honest, God-fearing men will do. But we are told that we must study "British interests," as if it were not always to a nation's truest interest to do righteousness. "But we must follow out our policy." I say, No! Let the policies which are founded on wrong be cast like idols to the moles and to the bats. Stand to that most admirable of policies,—"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Whether we are kings, or queens, or prime ministers, or members of parliament, or crossing sweepers, this is our rule if we are Christians.

Yes, and bring religion into your business, and let the light shine in the factory and in the counting-house. Then we shall not have quite so much china clay in the calicoes wherewith to cheat the foreigner, nor shall we see cheap and nasty articles described as of best quality, nor any other of the dodges in trade that everybody seems to practise now-a-days. You tradespeople and manufacturers are very much one like the other in this: there are tricks in all trades, and one sees it everywhere. I believe everybody to be honest in all England, Scotland, and

Ireland until he is found out; but whether there are any so incorruptible that they will never be found wanting this deponent sayeth not, for I am not a judge.

Do not put your candle under a bushel, but let it shine, for it was intended that it should be seen. Religion ought to be as much seen at our own table as at the Lord's table. Godliness should as much influence the House of Commons as the Assembly of Divines. God grant that the day may come when the mischievous division between secular and religious things shall no more be heard of, for in all things Christians are to glorify God, according to the precept, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

III. Our time has gone, but I must detain you a little while I speak upon the SHINING: "Let your light so shine before men."

When a candle shines it is because it cannot help it. Shining is the natural result of possessing light, and I want you, dear brethren, to exert a holy influence upon others, because the grace of God is really in you. Some men made desperate attempts to *appear* good; they would be far more successful if they would seek to *be* good. Grace must be in a man as a living fountain, and then rivers of living water will flow from him. The natural result of a renewed heart is a renewed life, and the natural result of a renewed life is that men see it and glorify God.

Shining, however, is not altogether a thing of necessity so as to forbid our attention to it, for the text demands care of us. "Let your light so shine." I must ask the printer to put the two letters—s, o,—in very large capitals. "Let your light SO shine—let it so shine that men may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." You will not shine in the best manner though you may have grace in your heart unless you abound in prayerful, watchful, earnest care. You must guard heart and lip and hand, or your light will not *so* shine before men as could be desired. Your light will need trimming. Neglect it not.

The shining which comes from the Christian is here described as "good works." Good talk is very well, but it takes a great deal of talk to light a room. Good works are the *splendour* of the light of God. What works are good works? I would answer—upright actions, honest dealings, sincere behaviour. When a man is scrupulously true, and sternly faithful, all right-minded persons admit that his works are good works. Good works are works of love, unselfish works, works done for the benefit of others and the glory of God. Deeds of charity, kindness, and brotherly love are good works. As also careful attendance to duty, and all service honestly done, together with all courses which promote the moral and spiritual good of our fellow-men. Works of devotion in which you prove that you love God and his Christ, that you love the gospel, that you desire to spread the kingdom of Christ,—these may not be so highly valued by ordinary people, but are eminently good works. Let these good and true things abound in you, and shine out from you; do them not out of ostentation, but still without shame.

Good works, like the shining of a candle, have good effects. A candle cheers the gloom. What a comfort it is when you have long been wandering in the dark to spy out a twinkling candle in a cottage window! A candle directs and guides men, and by its illumination it instructs them. In its light they see, discern, and discover. He who acts teaches.

The man who lives Christianity preaches it. He is the truest evangelist whose life brings glory to God and goodwill to men.

But note, it is said "it giveth light to all that are *in the house*"; so that when we are lit from on high we are first to shine at home. It is not abroad alone that we should make our Christianity known, but chiefly at the fireside, to those who are in the house. Some have a very little house, they live in a couple of rooms with a small family; let them take care that they have grace enough to make a few thoroughly happy, which is not always the easiest thing in the world. Others have a large family; may they have grace enough to influence the whole. A few have large workshops, and employ many hands, and these ought to exercise a holy influence over all their workfolks. Some of us are preachers of the gospel, and have a large house in which to shine: we shall need more of the oil of grace than others, that we may give light to the whole of our house; and that grace is to be had. The whole world is a house in which the church is the candle; and, therefore, the members of the church should so shine, each one in his place, that the whole world shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God.

The text says that the candle gives light to *all* that are in the house. Some professors give light only to a part of the house. I have known women very good to all but their husbands, and these they nag from morning to night, so that they give no light to them. I have known husbands so often out at meetings that they neglect home, and thus their wives miss the light. I have known masters who are utterly indifferent about their servants; and mistresses who quite forget to seek the good of their maids. If our light be in good order it will illuminate the parlour and the kitchen, the drawing room and the scullery, shining upon all that are in the house. Candles do not shed all their light either that way or this, but they shine in all directions. A Christian should be an all round man, blessing all, both great and small, who come in contact with him.

The object of our shining is not that men may see how good we are, nor even see us at all, but that they may see grace in us and God in us, and cry, "What a Father these people must have." Is not this the first time in the New Testament that God is called our Father? Is it not singular that the first time it peeps out should be when men are seeing the good works of his children? The Fatherhood of God is best seen in the holiness of saints. When men see that light is good they bless the source of that light, and seeing that it cometh from the Father of lights, they glorify his name.

I have had to hasten over all this, but I pray God to make it none the less effectual for the stirring up of every Christian here to use all the light he has. It is a dark world, and it seems to get darker, for the emissaries of Satan are going about thirsting to quench every light. Look ye well to your lamps—look ye well to your lamps, ye virgin souls. Trim well the flame, and go you forth even into the black night to meet the Bridegroom. Lift high your torches into the very face of darkness, and make men see that God the Father is still in the midst of his people.

The venerable Bede, when he was interpreting this text, said that Christ Jesus brought the light of Deity into the poor lantern of our

humanity, and then set it upon the candlestick of his church that the whole house of the world might be lit up thereby. So indeed it is. The reason why there is light in the church is that those who are in the dark may see. Churches do not exist for themselves, but for the world at large. Have ye thought of this, ye professors? Ye are blessed that ye may be a blessing. Take heed that ye behave aright. You go to Christ's wedding feast, and you are glad to hear that he turneth water into wine, and you are ready to bless him that he has kept the best wine until now. But oh, ye servants of God, remember what is said, "Draw out now and bear." These are your orders. There is the God-made wine—"Draw out now, and bear." Receive from Christ's fulness, and distribute to others. Neglect not your duty as servitors at your Lord's great feast. Your Master has taken the bread, and has blessed and broken it, and then he has given it to you. Is that the end of the process? Do you stand there and munch your own personal morsel with a miserable self-satisfaction? Nay, if you be indeed disciples of Christ you will remember that the next words are, "and the disciples to the multitude, and they did eat." Break then your bread among the hungry that surround you. Take the whole loaf of Christ, and rightly divide and distribute it, and you shall have as much left as at the first; yea, more, you shall gather of the fragments many baskets full. Only see ye to it that ye freely give what ye have freely received, lest hoarded manna breed corruption, lest a canker come upon your hoarded gold and silver, and lest your very souls grow mouldy even to reeking rottenness before God, because you have not drawn out your souls unto the hungry, nor sought to teach those who are perishing for lack of knowledge.

The Baptist Missionary Society will enable you to teach the heathen. Take a share in it. There, make the collection! Do your best!

The Eye and the Light

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light "—Luke xi. 33—36.

In this parable, our Lord Jesus Christ is the light. Some saw his brightness, and were even dazzled by it, as was that woman who cried, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." The malicious saw not his light, but even dared to impute his miracles to the Prince of darkness. Others professed to see so little light in him that they demanded a sign from heaven. Our Lord's constant answer was, to go shining on. He was meant to be observed; even as a lamp is intended to be seen. A lamp is not lighted to be placed in a cellar, nor to be hidden under a bushel: the lamp is lighted on purpose that all who come into the house may see the light. Even so, our Lord Jesus Christ could not be hid. In the narrow circle of the Holy Land, he shone so clearly that Gentiles came to the brightness of his rising. Yet, to make him seen to the ends of the earth, he must needs be set on the lamp-stand. He was lifted up by crucifixion; and anon he was further raised by resurrection: he was lifted up from earth to heaven at his ascension, and in another sense he was set on high by the descent of the Holy Ghost and the widespread ministry of his servants. Our Lord was thus taken from under the bushel of the obscurity which attached to his humble origin, brought away from the dark cellar of the despised Jewish nation, and set out in the open, where Greek and Roman, Barbarian and Scythian, might rejoice in his light. It is our duty to keep his name and his truth ever before the world, waiting for the time when every eye shall see him on the throne of his glory.

Our Lord would have all men behold the light of his gospel; for the text saith, "that they which come in may see the light." Whosoever comes into the church, or even into the world, should be met with this lamp; for this gospel is to be preached to every creature

under heaven. The mighty deeds of his salvation were not done in a corner: they are for world-wide observation. He that hath eyes to see let him see. If you do not see Jesus, it is not because he has hidden himself in darkness, but because your eyes are blinded. The light which streams from the face of Jesus is meant for human eyes: the tempered brightness of the Mediator's glory suits those eyes, which are bidden to look to him and live. Light is not for the rich, the wise, the strong, but for men as men. The doctrines of our Lord Jesus Christ are not meant to be the monopoly of a few learned doctors; they are the common inheritance of those who labour and are heavy laden. As the morning breaks for all weary, watching eyes, so shines the light of the glorious gospel for all who sit in darkness and long for the light of God.

Beloved, the great thing to be desired is that the light which is so freely given forth by the Lord Jesus may become light within our souls. There he stands, as the lamp placed upon the lampstand, conspicuous to all; but we need that the light outside in the room may become light inside, within the soul. Nothing more truly needs light than our inner man. We are, by nature, as a lantern with the candle blown out. Whether we will believe it or not, by nature we are in thick Egyptian night. Well saith the apostle, "Ye were sometimes darkness." Much is said about the light of conscience, but in many this is but a glimmering taper whose beams are "not light, but darkness visible." The light of nature is dimmed by so many surroundings, and has so little oil to sustain it, that it leads no man to eternal life, unless there be added to it light from above—the light of grace, the clear shining of the Holy Spirit.

Light is absolutely essential to spiritual life. Ignorance is not the mother of devotion, but of superstition. Knowledge, grace, truth, are the nurses of true faith. The light of God is needful to the life of God. We must know Christ, we must be illuminated by his Holy Spirit, we must have fellowship with the Father's truth, or else we are dead, as well as dark. Light within we must have, or the light outside will not benefit us. Upon that subject we will speak at this time. May God grant us the light of his Spirit; for it would be idle for us to try to explain the action of light while ourselves in darkness. Shine within, O Holy Spirit, that we speak not of theory, but of actual experience!

First, we will consider *how the light enters:* "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light." Secondly, we shall note *how this light may be perverted:* "When thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness." In conclusion, we shall observe *how the light acts within:* "If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light."

I. First, then, consider HOW THE LIGHT ENTERS THE SOUL. Into the body the light enters through the eye. A man without an eye might as well be without the sun, so far as light is concerned. The eye is as needful as the lamp, if a man is to see. The most brilliant light that ever has been invented, or ever can be discovered, will be

of no use to the person who has no eye: hence it is true, "The light of the body is the eye." It is most important to attend to that which is the eye of the inner man; for in vain doth Christ himself shine if his light cannot enter our souls. The condition of the eye of the mind is of the utmost importance: our light or our darkness will depend upon it. The eye of the soul may be viewed as the understanding, the conscience, the motive, or the heart. It would not be possible to confine it to any one of these names. I venture to call it "the intent of the mind"; or, if you will, "the aim of the heart," the honesty of the understanding. When God has given a man a true intent to see the light of the gospel, he has in that honest intent furnished him with an eye for the heavenly light. If the Holy Ghost makes us truly willing to know the truth, he has cleared the mental eye. The worst of it is, that men have no will to see the light of God: their foolish heart is darkened, and hence they do not understand, but altogether misrepresent the doctrine of the Lord Jesus. The battle of grace is with man's unwillingness to see those truths against which he is naturally at enmity. If a man wills to see the honest truth, and submits himself to the enlightenment of the Holy Ghost, he will not be left in darkness. When a man does not want to see, he cannot see: when he is determined not to learn, when truth is unpalatable to him, when he designedly twists it from its meaning, then his eye is diseased, and the light is hindered from its due effect.

Many things darken the eye of the soul. One of the most common is *prejudice*. The man conceives that he has light already. His father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and previous generations, were brought up in a certain religion, and therefore it must be right. Whether the lamp gives light or not, is not the question: it is the family lamp, and he will have no other. He will not enquire: he is quite sure, and wants no evidence. When the light of God comes to him, he at once repels it. He cannot be disturbed, and therefore he will not hear, nor read, nor consider the matter: he is satisfied to let things be as they are. The very supposition that he may be wrong he regards as an insult, maliciously invented by an uncharitable mind. What is to be done with one so blindfolded? Are there not many such?

Sloth, too, is a great blinder of the eye: it draws down the eyelid, and shuts out the light by the spirit of slumber. The man does not care what the gospel is, or is not. Like Pilate, he asks, "What is truth?" but he never waits for an answer. It is too much trouble to some people to think, to search the Scriptures, and to pray. They have no heart for a process so troublesome. "No," saith the worldling, "I have other fish to fry. I go my way to my farm, and to my merchandise. Let graceless bigots fight about creeds and the like; it matters not one jot what a man believes." Thus do many abide in the blackest darkness, because it is too much trouble to open the shutters, and draw up the blinds. Ah me! how dark are they who prefer an indolent ease to the light of God!

The light is often shut out by *gross error*. I cannot go over the list of the favourite errors of the present hour; for that list has grown too long for one day's reading. Speciously taught in selected phrases,

cunningly supported by a dreamy science, and adorned with certain great names, errors come to us nowadays as respectable forms of thought. Falsehoods of which we heard when we were children—but only heard of them as loathsome heresies, long ago decayed and thrown into the limbo of worthless and mischievous imaginations—these are now refashioned, freshened up with touches of bright colour, and brought out as advanced ideas. When any of these are permitted to occupy the mind, as they so commonly do nowadays, the old gospel is no longer seen, because the eye is inflamed by the incoming of a foreign and irritating substance. Can it be that what was true a hundred years ago, is not true now? Can it be that the gospel which saved souls in the days of the apostles, cannot save souls now? Is it so, that some men are wiser than God, and are qualified to sit in judgment upon prophets and apostles? Surely, judicial blindness has happened to this generation: the chaff of their own folly has darkened their eyes, and Christ is hid from them.

One thing darkens the eye more than any other, and that is *the love of sin*. Nine times out of ten, allowed sin is the cataract which darkens the mental eye. Men cannot see truth, because they love falsehood. The gospel is not seen, because it is too pure for their loose lives and lewd thoughts. Christ's holy example is too severe for the worldly; his Spirit is too pure for lovers of carnal pleasure. When people reject the doctrines of the gospel, they also tolerate laxity of morals, and give predominance to the customs of the world. How can men see, when sin hath pricked the very eyeballs of the mind! "How can ye believe," said Christ, "which receive honour one of another?" The love of worldly honour prevented the Pharisees from believing in the lowly Messiah. When sin, like a handful of mud, seals up the eye, you need not wonder that the man becomes an agnostic, a doubter, a caviller. To have a clear eye one must have a clean heart. The pure in heart shall see God; and hence the pure in heart see God's truth, so as to appreciate it and delight in it. Oh, that the Spirit of God may wash the filth out of our eyes, that we may walk in the light, as God is in the light.

Pride, too, is a great darkener of the soul's eye. When a man admires himself he never adores God. He that is taken up with the conceit of his own righteousness will never see the righteousness of Christ. If thou believest thyself to be pure thou wilt never prize the blood which cleanses from all sin. If thou believest thyself to be already perfect, thou wilt not prize the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. No man cries for grace till he perceives his own need of it: if, therefore, we be puffed up with the notion that we are rich and increased in goods, we shall never see the riches of grace which are treasured up in Christ Jesus. The light of God dwells not with human self-sufficiency. A man's own shadow is very often the means of keeping him in the dark.

Self-seeking, in every form, is a sad cause of obscuring the light of the soul. Self-seeking, in the grosser form of avarice, makes men grope in the daytime. The glitter of gold is injurious to the eye. How could Judas see the beauty of Christ when he saw such value in the thirty pieces of silver? How can a man set store by a future

heaven when a present fortune is heaven enough for him? Mammon repays its worshippers with blinded eyes. Self does the same when it appears as ambition, desire of honour and respect, or a wish to have a finger in one's own salvation. The proud desire to share the glory of our salvation with free grace prevents the entrance of the light of God. Self, in the form of magnifying the nobility of human nature, extolling the grandeur of our common humanity, and all that, is a very blinding thing. How can a man that has his eye upon self have any sight for Jesus? Of all antichrists, self is the hardest to overcome. It is written, "He must increase, but I must decrease"; but if proud self will not endure a decrease, how can I see Christ increasing? There is no room for him in my heart. Appreciation of self leads to depreciation of the Lord Jesus.

Multitudes are kept in darkness through *fear of men*. They dare not see. They feel bound to think as the fashion goes—and there is a fashion of opinions as well as of coats and bonnets. If you resolve to hold fast the faith once delivered to the saints you will be regarded as antiquated, and you will be as much pointed out for your faith, as you would be for your dress if you should walk down the street in the costume of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. To many it would be great sin to be singular. They never think for themselves; in fact, they are mentally shiftless. They ask their way of a certain person supposed to be a deeper student than themselves: of him they enquire what they ought to believe, disbelieve, praise, or blame. I remember well a man who never knew whether he liked a sermon till he had asked a certain knowing old gentleman whether it was a good one or not: he had no home-grown judgment, he imported his ideas. His brains, for safe keeping, were placed in another person's head: this is a very convenient thing, and saves a good deal of headache; but it has its drawbacks. Some persons put all their thinking out, and have it done for them by the dozen: but he that would have God's light, knows that it comes not to the coward who fears the frown of a mortal, and makes man his god. God could have given to the crowd a common judgment, and have left us to be guided by a central authority, if he had thought it right so to do; but having given to each individual an understanding, he expects us to use it, and to an honest personal use of understanding he gives the light. The eye of the sparrow or of the ant may be very small, yet it sees the great light, if it be a single and clear eye. Pray, then, for grace, that you may search out for yourselves the truth of God, free from the fear of man which bringeth a snare. Let us never enquire, "Have any of the rulers believed?" Whether the rulers have or have not believed, let us follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and rejoice in that pure light which flows from him.

God save you, dear friends, from having your eye injured by any of the mischiefs I have mentioned. There are legions more of these blinding things: may grace guard you from them! God give you a "single eye," by which is meant an eye which does not look at two things at a time—a mind which is free from sinister motives, and from anything which would cause you to choose falsehood rather than truth, and wrong rather than right. God grant that we may have a desire

to be right, a resolute design to know the truth as it is in Jesus, and to feel and act in sincere conformity therewith! Oh, to be sincere, simple-hearted, child-like, true! We want neither great genius nor sparkling wit, but we need an unsophisticated mind; for so the light gets entrance into the soul through the Spirit of God.

II. Secondly, let us consider HOW THE LIGHT MAY BE PERVERTED. Some men might have light enough, but their eye is in such an evil condition that the light is turned into darkness. I suppose that in the natural world light could not actually become darkness; but in the spiritual kingdom it is certainly so: "When thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness." Hearken, my brethren, and take heed.

A man has heard the gospel of free grace and dying love, he has heard a message full of love concerning the forgiveness of sin, and pardon bought with blood, and freely given to him that believeth. The doctrine of justification by faith has been clearly explained to him. He believes firmly in these great evangelical truths, and calls them glorious and precious. But he draws an inference from this teaching which is ruinous to his soul. He considers that, after all, sin is of small consequence, and he may indulge in it freely, for God is merciful, and grace is infinite. At some time or other he will repent and believe in Jesus, and then he will be set right, however grossly he may have offended. God is gracious, and therefore he may be sinful: God freely forgives, and therefore he may recklessly offend. This is to turn light into darkness. Such turning of the grace of God into lasciviousness is infamous. Words cannot set forth the hideous ingratitude of such depraved argument. We may justly say of a man who thus turns light into darkness, "his damnation is just." Yet no doubt there are many such who silently, in their own hearts, draw from the goodness of God a license to sin. Ah, my hearer! if your eye be in this condition, the more freely we preach to you the gospel of the grace of God, the more surely will you go from sin to sin. This is terrible. O false hearts! what shall I do with you? You make me wish to be dumb, lest I minister to your condemnation. In the lowest hell you are digging for yourselves a deeper hell: you use the promises of mercy as the instruments of your own destruction. What! can you hang yourselves nowhere but on the cross? Can you drown yourselves nowhere but in the waters of Siloah? What has come to you, that you are so infatuated as to find your death in the gospel which is ordained for life?

Let me set before you another form of this evil. A man perceives the great value of the means of grace, but he goes further and misuses them. Having been brought up religiously, he has a deep respect for the ministers of God's house, for the services of the sanctuary, and especially for the two ordinances which Christ has established in his church—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. He reverences the Sabbath and the inspired Word, and the church and all its sacred ministries. But it may be that he proceeds from a due regard of these things to a superstitious trust in them, making of them what God has never made of them: thus his light becomes darkness. He

regards attendance upon public worship as a substitute for inward religion; he looks upon membership with a church as a certificate of salvation. He may be so foolish as to speak of Baptism as an ordinance whereby he was made a member of Christ, and a child of God; and of the Supper of the Lord as a saving ordinance, or even as a sacrifice for the quick and dead. When instructive symbols are perverted into instruments of priestcraft, the light is turned into darkness. By multitudes, in these days, aids to faith are degraded into the machinery of superstition. The church, which is our mother and nurse, is made into an antichrist, and men look to her for salvation instead of looking wholly and alone to the Lord Jesus Christ. Outward modes of worship and instruction may be very beneficial, but if they are allowed to usurp the confidence of the soul, they may gender disease and death. When a man's religion becomes his destruction, how sure is that destruction!

I have known many go another way: they have said, "I care very little about the shape or form of religion. A sincere spirit is everything. The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." Such a man professes to clutch at the soul of things, but I have seen him grow indifferent in creed and licentious in life. He believes everything to have some measure of truth in it; every evil practice to have some good point about it. This is a poisonous atmosphere for any man to breathe. Hear him talk, if you would see how the worse can be made to seem the better. Nothing to him is fixed truth, nor even settled right. He is like the chameleon, which takes its colour from the changing light about it. This he calls "liberty"; but assuredly it is not the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free. Say, rather, it is the light of charity turned into the darkness of indifference. How great is this darkness! How many are deceived by it! After all, there is light and there is darkness, and they are not the same thing. There is truth, taught of God, and there is a lie, which is the devil's own; and these will never sit at the same table. There is a blessing for the preacher of the truth; but if any man preach another gospel, for him there is an anathema which none can reverse.

I have also seen this light turned to darkness in the case of the student who has gathered great erudition, and enrolled himself among the learned. He begins to criticize. Do not condemn him for that: he judges very properly at first, he criticizes things that ought to be criticized; but he stops not there. Once having his critical faculty aroused, he is like a boy with a new knife; he must cut something or other. Nothing comes in his way more often than the Scriptures; and he must have a cut at them. He whittles at Genesis; he makes a gash in Deuteronomy; he halves Isaiah; he takes slices out of the Gospels, and cuts the Epistles into slivers. You see, he has so sharp a knife that he must use it. By-and-by, from a critic he advances to an irreverent fault-finder, and from that to an utter unbeliever, hard in the mouth and stiff in the neck. His light has blinded him. He has taken his own eye to pieces that he might study its anatomy, and henceforth the light will be of no more use to him than to the dead.

We have seen the light turned to darkness in a further sense; hear and understand. There is a blessed light called the full assurance

of faith: the more we have of it the better. Blessed is that man who never doubts his God, who hangs with holy confidence upon the eternal promise and the immutable covenant, and is never staggered through unbelief. He walks in the light of God, and enjoys divine fellowship. But I have seen something very like to this holy confidence which has been before the Lord a very different matter. Assurance has been counterfeited by presumption. The man has taken for granted that he is a child of God when he is not, and he has appropriated privileges which are none of his. He has supposed himself to be in the covenant when he has neither part nor lot in the matter; and without repentance, without the new birth, and without saving faith, he has dared to boast of those sacred securities which belong only to the heirs of grace, sanctified in Christ Jesus. Dreadful is the case of the man who has presumed to hope for heaven while living an ungodly life; boasting of freedom from all fear, when, indeed, he was destitute of all hope.

I have also seen the light turned to darkness in quite another manner. Sweet and soft is the light of holy fear: it is as the twilight of the evening. It is a light that comes from God, when a man is afraid to sin, when he fears lest he should grieve the Spirit of God, when he trembles lest in anything he should err from the teaching of his heavenly Father. But then this light may be corrupted into slavish dread, despondency, and despair. Introspection, or looking within, may degenerate into a morbid habit: under its influence, the soul may refuse to look to Christ, and may enshroud itself in the gloom of remorse. Truth may be distorted till it takes a most alarming shape, and the soul, in sullen despair, refuses to be comforted, refuses to believe in the Son of God.

Do you wonder that our Lord seemed to hold up his hands in astonishment as he said, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" If that which should lead misleads, how misled you will be! If your better part turns out to be evil, how evil must you be! See to it then, dear friends, as before the living God, that you have a clear eye, and that the light of Christ comes streaming into your soul in all its glorious purity and power.

III. I close by coming to the third and most important point: HOW THE LIGHT ACTS WHEN IT COMES WITHIN. If the eye be right, single, and clear, there is no laborious work for that eye to do to obtain the light. When the sun is shining, if you wish for light you simply open your eyes, and you have light at once. You have not to rub the eye, or work it into some singular position: let the outward light come to the eye, and at once it enters it, and conveys an image to the mind. When the eye is sound it takes pleasure in the light, and with delight conveys the image of things external to the mind within. If the Lord, in his great grace, has made your eye single, so that you desire only to know the truth, and to be yourself true, then without toil you will perceive truth, and the image thereof will readily appear before your mind. The light is willing enough to enter when the window of the soul allows its admission. When that light comes in, you will know it. No man passes from his natural darkness into heavenly light without being aware that a great change has taken place.

Beloved, I will try to show you how the holy light acts when it enters our nature.

When it first comes in *it reveals* much that was before unperceived. If a room has been long shut up, and kept in darkness, the light has a startling effect. You may have hurried through that room with a candle, but you never stayed to look, and therefore did not notice the state of things. The room did not strike you as being very unpleasant, though it smelt a little stale and fusty; but now that you have put back the shutters and drawn up the blind, the light has made the mould and dust very manifest. That black festoon of spiders' webs; those insects which hurry out of the light; that all-encrusting dust—these had been overlooked. The room cannot be suffered to remain in such a state. What a change is demanded! All hands are summoned to clean out the den, and turn it into a healthy chamber fit to be inhabited. The light of heaven reveals a thousand sins, and causes their removal. The first effect of the light of God in the soul is painfully unpleasant: it makes you loathe yourself, and almost wish that you had never been born. Things grow worse and worse to our consciousness as the light shines more and more. Beloved, we wish it to be so. We would have no part kept in the dark. We would have every idol discovered and broken, every secret chamber of imagery exposed to the sun, and then destroyed. Is it not so? Do you wish to keep the light from any one part of your nature? Do you not far rather desire that the light should search you through and through, and lay bare all the deceitfulness of the heart, and all the falseness of the depraved mind?

As that light continues to enter, *it gradually illuminates* each faculty of the mind. The will by nature prefers the darkness: the man claims the right to act as he pleases, and to give no reasons for his waywardness. When the light of God enters the soul, the Lord Jesus becomes altogether lovely, and then the sacred light falls on the proud will, and the man sees that it is evil and perverse, and he cries, "O Lord Jesus, not my will, but thine, be done." This same light falls on the outward life which is ruled by the will, and the conduct and conversation become bright with the light of love. The judgment feels the inner illumination, and decides according to the law of truth and righteousness. With the judgment the delight is lit up also, and the heart rejoices in the law of the Lord.

The light is poured in upon the conscience, and now that poor, half-blinded thing issues edicts and gives forth verdicts which are according to the oracles of God. What a difference between a natural conscience and a conscience instructed by God, and enlightened by his Word! There remains much more to be done in this direction than many of us suspect. We may be living unconsciously in evils for which our consciences have never once accused us. Godly men, in old time, persecuted those who differed from them, and thought it a duty to do so: they even called toleration a crime. The best of men owned negro slaves, and were not conscious of wrong. When Mr. Whitefield left certain negroes to the Orphan House, he did not dream that he was violating the rights of man: in fact, he was very careful for their present and future welfare. Conscience does not tolerate slavery now. Do you

not think that a great enlightenment has taken place upon the drink question? Is not similar light needed as to war, as to wage-paying and wage-earning, and a thousand other things? It is a happy thing that we have received a light which will shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. There is nothing hid within us which this light will not manifest; and so, as, one by one, we see our imperfections, we shall cry for grace to remove them, and thus we shall grow in holiness through the grace of God.

This same light, falling on the memory, awakens penitence for our faults and gratitude for God's goodness. Shining on our thoughts, it makes them sparkle with the beauty of holiness; shining upon our emotions, it makes them flash and glow with love to God and heavenly things. A soul is a fine object when thus lit up! The holy light falls on our motives, and unveils the secret heart of all our actions. You do right, but this light shows you why you do right. You are a friend to man, but why? You are a Christian professor, but are you sincere? The light makes short work with that which did not flow from a pure motive. This light falls also on the spirit in which a deed was done; and here much is seen which some had rather not see.

Did you ever have the light of God brought to bear upon your imagination? Imagination is the play-room of the soul. Here many a man considers that he is without law. "Surely," says he, "thought is free." The man gloats over sins which he would fear to commit: he finds a pleasure in thinking over lusts which his circumstances compel him to avoid. In the dark chambers of imagination the heart commits adulteries, murders, thefts, and all manner of infamies. When the light falls here, the man shudders as he learns that as he thinketh in his heart so is he. He trembles as he perceives that the fond imagination of sin is sin. Then is the floor of imagination purged, and the foul dust and chaff are driven into the fire. Fancy then gleams in the light of God, and imagination, washed in the brazen laver, sings songs on her stringed instruments unto the God of her salvation, who has brought her out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Brethren, we need the light to shine in upon our tempers. We know some Christian people who will not let you mention their tempers: they have taken out a license to be as surly as they like, on the ground of "it is their constitution." "No," they say, "I cannot help being passionate. My mother was a very quick-tempered woman, and I am naturally in that way. There's no help for it." Let the light in upon that unseemly thing. If what you say be true, write it down in black and white that you are an incorrigible vixen, and must be so all your life. What! Do you not like it? If it is true, let the light in upon it. Let it be known to your own self and to others that you are a mad dog, and that there is no curing you. Are you angry with me for suggesting it? I am only taking you at your word. Do not say, "I cannot help having a bad temper." Friend, you must help it. Pray God to help you to overcome it at once; for either you must kill it, or it will kill you. You cannot carry a bad temper into heaven. They will have none of your passions in the Father's house above. Let in the light of Christ's love on it, and the vile thing will be made to die. It is a night-bird; it cannot bear the light of grace and love.

Live near to Jesus, and his compassion will destroy your evil passion. Try it.

Your desires, your hopes, your fears, your aspirations, should all be set in the light, and what a joy it will be when they all glitter in it! "No part dark"—what a wonderful condition! Some professors appear to have a little light in the upper rooms; they have notions in their heads, and ideas on their tongues! Alas! the first floor is dark, very dark. From their common conversation the light of God is absent. Enter at the door, and you cannot see your way into the passage, or up the stairs; the light is up aloft, but not in the dwelling-rooms. Oh, for light in the region of the heart! Oh, for light upon the household talk, and the business conversation! From garret to cellar may the whole houses of our humanity be lighted up! This is the true work of grace, when the whole man is brought into the light, and no part is left to pine in the darkness. Then are we the children of light, when we abide in the light, and have no fellowship with darkness. Then is the distinction seen between Israel and Egypt; for while all Egypt sat in a darkness which might be felt, in the land of Goshen there was light.

Where this light comes it gives *certainty:* we cease to doubt, and we know whom we have believed. With this comes *direction:* we see our way, and how to walk in it. We pursue a plain path, and are no more in a maze. "This is the way, walk ye in it," is sounded in our ears as the light reveals to us the narrow way which leads to life eternal.

This light, when it dwells in the heart, *brings good cheer* with it. Darkness is doleful, light brings delight. Did you never travel by a train which passed through a tunnel, but was destitute of a single lamp? Somebody has struck a match, and lighted a candle, and all eyes have turned towards him. In a small way he was a benefactor: all eyes are glad of light. Oh, what a sweet thing is the light of the Holy Spirit to one that has been long in the darkness of ignorance, sorrow, and despair! A poor boy who was put down in the coal mine to close a door after the coal waggons had passed by, was forced to sit there all alone, hour after hour, in the dark. He was a gracious child; and when one said to him, "Are you not weary with sitting so long in the dark?" he said, "Yes, I do get tired; but sometimes the men give me a bit of candle, and *when I get a light I sing.*" So do we. When we get a light we sing. Glory be to God, he is our light and our salvation, and therefore we sing. O child of God, when your eye is single, and the light of God fills every part of your being, then you sing, and sing again, and feel that you can never have done singing on earth, till you begin singing in heaven.

The text has perplexed many a learned reader; and therefore you will not wonder that I confess that it has puzzled me many times. See what it says:—"If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light." Is not this saying the same thing? The Holy Spirit would not use a tautology, nor utter a trite, self-evident thing. Yet we must not go beyond what the text says. It seems to me that our Lord wished us to feel that he could say nothing better in praise of a soul in which there was no part dark than what he had said, namely, "The whole shall be full of light."

Some have thought that he meant that being lighted within we shall be full of light to others. That is a great truth; but our Lord does not say so here; for he compares our inward light to a candle which shines on ourselves: "as when the bright shining of a candle doth give *thee* light." He refers to our own personal comfort. When a room is thoroughly well lighted up in every corner, it has a joyous splendour. One looks about and feels content and satisfied. So, when the whole nature is filled with the light of God, we have sweetness and light to the full, and heaven seems begun below. It is inexpressibly delightsome, luxuriously blessed, to dwell in the full light of God when there is no concealment and no love of evil. When once the sun thus shines full on me I would cry with Joshua, "Sun, stand thou still"!

This inner light will make us shine before others. It is the only shining we should seek. A clean lantern with a lighted candle in it makes no noise, and yet it wins attention: the darker the night, the more is it valued. There never was a time in which true inner light was more needed than now: may the Lord impart it to each one of us, and then we shall shine as lights in the world! The Lord God bring this light to you, and fill you with it; and unto his name shall be the glory! You have not to work for the light, you have only to receive it. Then shall your profiting be known unto all men when it is true profiting to your own character. God bless you, for Christ's sake! Amen.

The Two Builders and Their Houses

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it"—Matthew vii. 24—27.

THESE were the closing words of our Saviour's most famous sermon upon the mount. Some preachers concentrate all their powers upon an effort to conclude with a fine thing called a peroration; which, being interpreted, means a blaze of rhetorical fireworks, in the glory of which the speaker subsides. They certainly have not the example of Christ in this discourse to warrant them in the practice. Here is the Saviour's peroration, and yet it is as simple as any other part of the address. There is an evident absence of all artificial oratory. The whole of his hill-sermon was intensely earnest, and that earnestness was sustained to the end, so that the closing words are as glowing coals, or as sharp arrows of the bow. Our Lord closes not by displaying his own powers of elocution, but by simply and affectionately addressing a warning to those who, having heard his words, should remain satisfied with hearing, and should not go forth and put them into practice. As according to usual experience a preacher warms to his subject as he advances, and becomes more intense as he nears his final sentences, we are bound to give the more earnest heed to the words which are now before us, with which the Lord of all preachers concluded his memorable discourse.

Jesus had been saying many things, but these are two words to which I think he specially alluded when he said, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man." The first of these words was, "*Enter ye in*" (Matthew vii. 13); and the second was, "*Beware*" (Matthew vii. 15). Our Lord had spoken of the "strait gate," of the "narrow way," and of the few who travel it, and his urgent admonition was, "Enter ye in." Not "Learn ye all concerning it, and then be satisfied;" not "Find fault with the travellers and the road;" not "Seek to enlarge the gate and widen the way," but "Enter ye in." Be obedient to the gospel, believe its

testimony concerning Jesus; enter into fellowship with its mysteries, receive its blessings: be travellers along its road. "Enter ye in." He who hears of the way to heaven, but enters not into it, is a foolish man; he who hearing of the strait gate, presses to enter in, is a wise man.

Afterwards our Lord added the other admonition, "Beware." "Beware," saith he, "of false prophets;" and after having dwelt for awhile on that, he added in other words, "Beware of false professions." Of false prophets beware, for they may delude you, they may bring before you a salvation which will not save, a mere mirage that looks like the pure, cooling, refreshing stream, but which only mocks your thirst. Beware of all teaching which would lead you away from the one Saviour of the souls of men. And then he adds, "Beware of false professions," however loudly they make you cry, "Lord, Lord." You may have in company with these professions the loftiest gifts, such as casting out devils; and the greatest abilities, such as only prophets possess; but they shall not avail you. In that day when the Master shall only accept into his marriage-feast the companions of his warfare on earth, he will say to those who have not done the Father's will, "I never knew ye; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." These are two of the sayings of Christ, and they are comprehensive of almost all he ever said: "Enter ye in" and "Beware." Take heed that ye do them as well as hear them.

I. We shall now proceed to the Master's parable, and will you please notice, first of all, THE TWO BUILDERS.

The wise and the foolish man were both engaged in precisely the same avocations, and to a considerable extent achieved the same design; both of them undertook to build houses, both of them persevered in building, both of them finished their houses. The likeness between them is very considerable. *They were equally impressed with the need of building a house.* They perceived the necessity of shelter from the heavy rains, they were alike desirous of being shielded from the floods, and screened from the wind. The advantage of a house to dwell in was evident to both. Even thus, at this period, we have a large number in the congregation who are impressed with the conviction that they need a Saviour. I am delighted to find that there is a stir among my hearers, and I trust it is a movement of God's Holy Spirit; and as a result very many of you feel deeply that you need a refuge from the wrath to come. You now admit that you must be forgiven, justified, regenerated and sanctified, and your desires are fervent; for all which I am deeply grateful, but also deeply anxious. You are in crowds desirous of becoming builders, and although some are wise and some foolish, up to this present we can see no difference in you; for you seem to be equally convinced that you need eternal life, and a good hope for the world to come. Nor does the likeness end here, for the two builders were both alike *resolved to obtain what they needed*—a house; and their determination was not in words only, but in deeds, for they both resolutely set to work to build. In the same way there are among us at this hour many who are resolved that if Christ is to be had, they will have him; and if there is such a thing as salvation, they will find it. They are very earnest, intensely earnest, and though some of them will fail, and some of them succeed, yet up to this point they are both alike, and none but

he who searcheth all hearts can discern the slightest difference. I look with sadness upon the two pilgrims, with their faces zealously turned Zionward, and I sigh as I wonder which one will find the Celestial City, and which will join with Formalist and Hypocrisy, and perish on the Dark Mountains. We are glad to hear of yearning hearts and resolute determinations, but, alas! all is not wheat that grows in corn-fields, all is not gold that glitters. Appearances are very very hopeful, but appearances are often deceptive. There may be a deep sense of need, and there may be a determined resolution to get that need supplied, and yet out of two seekers, one may find and the other may miss, one may be foolish and the other may be wise.

These two builders seem to have been *equally well skilled in architecture.* The one could build a house without receiving any more instruction than the other. I do not find that there was halt or pause on the part of either because he could not turn an arch, or fix a truss. Evidently they were both skilled workmen, well acquainted with their art. So is it with many here. They know as far as the theory goes what the plan of salvation is, as well as I do. Yet, where the knowledge is the same, the ultimate result may vary; two men may be equally well instructed in the Scriptures, yet one of them may be wise and the other foolish. To know what faith is, what repentance is, what a good hope in Christ is, may all be yours, and yet it may but increase your misery for ever. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. It is not the hearer, but the doer of the word, that is blessed. Knowledge puffeth up; love alone buildeth up. My dear friends, I am most earnest that those of you who are desiring to find everlasting life in Christ Jesus, may not be content with anything short of a true, deep, and real work of grace in your hearts; for no clearness of head knowledge, no natural earnestness of purpose or eagerness of desire can save you; without an interest in Christ Jesus you are lost to all eternity. "Ye must be born again;" ye must be brought into vital union with the living Saviour, or your hopefulness will end in overwhelming destruction.

Once more, *these two builders both persevered and finished their structure.* The foolish man did not begin to build, and then cease his work because he was not able to finish; but, as far as I know, his house was finished with as much completeness as the other; and, perhaps, furnished quite as well. If you had looked at the two structures, they would have seemed equally complete from basement to roof, and yet there was a great difference between them in a most essential point. Even thus, alas! many persevere in seeking salvation until they imagine that they have found it; they abide for years in the full belief that they are saved; they cry, "Peace, peace," and write themselves down amongst the blessed, and yet a fatal error lies at the base of all their religion; all their hopes are vain, and their life-work will prove to be a terrible failure. The builders are much alike up to this point, but yet in reality they are wide as the poles asunder both in work and character. The one builder is wise, the other foolish; the one superficial, the other substantial; the one pretentious, the other sincere. The wise man's work was honest work where men's eyes could not judge of it, the other's work was only well wrought above ground, there was nothing

of reality in the hidden parts; and hence in due time the first builder rejoiced as he saw his house outlive the storm; the other with his house was swept away to total destruction.

II. Thus much upon the two builders, let us now think upon THEIR TWO HOUSES.

One chief apparent difference between the two edifices probably was this, *that one of them built his house more quickly than the other.* The wise man had to spend a deal of time in underground work. Luke tells us that he digged deep, and laid his foundation on a rock. Now that rock-blasting, that carving and cutting of the hard granite, must have consumed days and weeks. The foolish builder had not this delay to encounter; the sand was all smooth and ready for him; he was able to commence at once to lay his courses of brick, and raise the walls with all rapidity. But all haste is not good speed, and there be some who travel too fast to hold. Unsound professors are often very rapid in their supposed spiritual growth. They were yesterday unconverted, to-day they become believers, to-morrow they begin to teach, the next day they are made perfect. They appear to be born of full stature, and equipped at all points, like Minerva, when, according to the fable, she leaped from the brain of Jupiter. They come up in a night, and alas! too often, like Jonah's gourd, they perish also in a night. Now I raise not a question concerning the genuine character of sudden conversions. I believe that sudden conversions are among the best and truest forms of conversion. Take, for instance, that of the apostle Paul. But still there are among those who profess to have been suddenly converted a sadly numerous company who answer to the description I have just given, for they build very, very quickly, much too quickly for the masonry to be well constructed and lasting. It may be that some mourner is lamenting bitterly that he makes very slow progress in grace. "I have been seeking God in prayer," says one, "these months. I have been humbled and broken down under a sense of sin for weeks, and have only as yet had now and then a glimpse of hope, when I have been able to turn my eye to the crucified Saviour. I have as yet few consolations, and many doubts. I fain would have the full light of love in my heart, but the dawning is slow in breaking." Well, friend, you are building slowly, but if it be surely, you shall have no cause to regret that deep digging. Small cause will you have to mourn that it took you longer to arrive at peace than it did your hasty friend, if your peace shall last you to eternity, while his hope shall be a possession in cloudland, driven away of the wind.

Of the two houses, one was built, I doubt not, *with far less trouble than the other.* Digging foundations in hard rocks, as I have said, takes time, but it also involves labour. Oftentimes did that wise builder pause to wipe the sweat from his brow; oftentimes did he retire to his bed worn out with his day's work, and yet there was not a stone appearing above the soil. His neighbour, opposite, had run up the walls, had reached the gable, was almost about to put on the roof, before there was scarce a foot above the ground of the wise builder's structure. "Ah," said he of the sandy foundation, "your toil is needless, and you have nothing to show for it. See how quickly my walls have risen, and yet I don't slave as you do. I take things easily; I

neither bore myself nor the rocks, and yet see how my house springs up, and how neat it looks! Your old-fashioned ways are absurd. You dig and hammer away down below there as if you meant to pierce the centre. Why not use your common sense, and go a-head as I do. Away with your sighing and groaning, do as I do, and rejoice at once. Anxiety will kill you." After this fashion are truly awakened souls, like "lamps despised of those who are at ease." One man jumps, as it were, into peace, and boasts himself secure; whether he is correct or not in his confidence, he does not pause to question, he is too comfortable to have time to enquire into that matter. The estate is fair, why worry about the title-deeds? The feast is rich, why tarry for the wedding-garments? If a doubt should arise, the carnally secure man ascribes it to Satan, and puts it aside, whereas it is his own conscience and the warning voice of heaven which bid him take heed and be not deceived. The prayer for the Lord to search and try his heart and his reins, he never sincerely offers. Such a man does not like self-examination, and cannot endure to be told that there must be fruits meet for repentance. He takes things at guess-work, comes to rash conclusions, and shuts his eyes to disagreeable facts. He dreams that he is rich and increased in goods, whereas he is naked, and poor, and miserable. Alas, what a waking will be his! His more serious companion aroused at the same time is, on the other hand, far more diffident and self-distrustful; when he prays his heart groans before God, yet he fears he does not pray aright, and never rises from his knees contented with himself. He is not quite so soon satisfied about the reality of his faith as the other; "Perhaps," says he, "after all it is not the faith of God's elect." He examines himself whether he be in the faith. He trembles lest he should have the form of godliness without the power. He is afraid of shams and counterfeits, and is for buying gold tried in the fire. "My repentance," saith he, "am I sure it is a real loathing of sin as sin, or did I only shed a tear or two under the excitement of a revival service? Am I sure that my nature is renewed by the work of the Holy Ghost, or is it mere reformation?" You see this second man has much exercise of soul, he labours to enter into rest, lest by any means he should seem to come short of it. He has many strivings, many anxieties, many searchings of heart, because he is sincere and fears to be deceived. From him the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, he finds the gate strait and the way narrow, and that the righteous scarcely are saved.

Be thankful, dear hearer, if you are among this second class, for these are the true sons of God, and heirs of immortality. Your house costs you more to build, but it will be worth the cost. O beware of wearing the sheep's clothing without the sheep's nature; beware of saying "Lord, Lord," while you are the servant of sin. Beware of getting up fictitious religion, borrowing your experience from biographies, picking up godliness at second-hand from your mothers and fathers, and friends and acquaintances. Whatever it may cost you of heart-breaking and agony, see to it that the sure foundation is reached, and the house so builded, that it will endure the trials which will inevitably test it. I would fain saturate my speech with tears, so weighty and so needful do I feel this caution to be, both to myself and you.

I should think that, in the course of time, although the foolish builder

built with so much less cost, and so much more rapidly, *his walls would be liable to very ugly settlements.* For walls that have no foundation, but are piled up on the sand, would every now and then gape wide with hideous cracks; and stones would start here, and timbers would slip there, and cement and stopping would be much required. What work for daubers and plasterers to make the ruinous fabric look like decent masonry! Very likely when a settlement was covered up in one place, another would happen in the next wall; for with such a foundation it would be hard to keep the structure well together, and in the long run I should not wonder but what it would cost the foolish builder more pains to keep up his wretched edifice than it did the wise builder who laboured so hard with his foundation at the first. Mark you well, that mere formal religion and hypocrisy in the end become a very difficult affair to maintain. The man has to struggle hard to patch up his reputation, propping it up with new lies, and bolstering it with fresh pretences. At one time an unrenewed will rebels fiercely, and he has to feign resignation to affliction; next an unconquered lust demands indulgence, and he has to conceal the sin with more double-distilled deceit; the form of prayer becomes irksome, and he has to screw himself up to the horrible farce; and meanwhile his outward life is always on the verge of a slip, and he fears detection. One way and another he is continually afraid, like a thief at large who fears that the police will find him. At every puff of wind his habitation threatens to tumble about his ears. He half wishes after all that he had been at the trouble of digging a foundation on the rock, but with desperate resolve he puts from him the voice of caution, and will have none of its rebuke. O dear hearer, rest assured that truth, after all, is the cheapest and easiest in the long run. Your gilt, your varnish, your paint, your hypocrisy, soon wear off, while the reality is at no expense for beautifying. Even as a matter of consideration for this life, it will be more hard in the long run to keep up the pretentious than to maintain the true; and then in the latter case you have God at your back, while he abhors everything unreal. I beseech you see to it that ye daub not your walls with untempered mortar, lest they not only come down with a crash when most you need to shelter behind them, but even now begin to show alarming signs of decay.

The higher the foolish man built the harder work he had to keep it upright, for of course every tier of bricks that he laid made the weight the greater, and caused the sand to give way. The nearer heaven the builder went the sooner his wall bowed to its fall. A man who only makes it his aim to be thought a respectable man by attending a place of worship, may manage pretty well to keep up such a low wall even without a foundation; another man who joins a worldly church—a church that makes no pretence of purity—can also succeed with ease; but if he joins a church of Jesus Christ which carefully seeks to preserve purity in its membership, he has hard work to live up to the standard required of him. Suppose, yet further, that he should become a deacon or an elder, and he is devoid of grace, his higher aim will cost him more by far—for there are more to look at him, and there is more required of him. Now he prays in public, now he speaks a word of instruction to enquirers, and what straits

and shifts the poor man is driven to, how constantly out of his own mouth is he condemned? "Why," saith he in his heart, "I know nothing about these things in my soul, and yet I have to speak and act as if I were taught of God." If he becomes a preacher, he is in a still more pitiful plight; what hard work must it be, then, to keep up the character! When the tower rises tier upon tier, upon so frail a base, it leans like the tower of Pisa, and unlike that singular structure it threatens to come down with a crash. By-and-by such a trumpery thing falls in utter ruin, and its elevation helps to hasten the catastrophe. So, my dear hearers, the more spirituality you aim at, and the more usefulness you strive for, the worse for you, unless you have a good foundation to begin with, in true sincerity and real faith. So bad is the course of unsound religion, that the further you go in it the worse it becomes.

The main difference, however, between the two houses did not lay in these cracks and settlements, nor in the cheapness or rapidity of the building—*it lay out of sight, underground.* It was all a matter of foundation. How many there are who suppose that if a thing is out of sight it may as well be out of mind! Who do you think is likely to dig down and see what the foundations are? "Well," saith one, "I see no need for being over precise; I do not believe in being so particular. What nobody sees cannot signify." Many subscribe to the graceless song—

> "For faith and grace let foolish zealots fight;
> He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

"You pay twenty shillings in the pound, attend a place of worship take the sacrament, be charitable, and say your prayers, and never trouble about anything further"—that is the popular notion. "What is the use of fretting about your heart? That is all transcendental nonsense. What can it signify?" That is how the foolish builder comforted himself, and he doubtless sneered at the wise builder as a poor miserable creature, who was righteous overmuch, and melancholy. Outward appearance is everything with men, but nothing with God. The essential difference between the true child of God and the mere professor is not readily to be discovered, even by spiritual minds; but the Lord sees it. It is a secret mysterious something which the Lord prizes, "for he knoweth them that are his." He separates between the precious and the vile. He putteth away the pretenders as dross, but he suffereth no sincere heart to be destroyed.

What, then, is this important matter? I answer it is just this. Beloved hearer, if thou wouldst be built on a rock, see to it that thou hast *a true sense of sin.* I do not say that a sense of sin is a preparation for Christ, and that we ought to put men back from the gospel till they feel their sin; but I do believe that wherever there is true faith in Jesus there goes with it a deep abhorrence of sin. Faith without contrition is a dead and worthless faith. When I meet with professors who talk lightly of sin, I feel sure that they have built without a foundation. If they had ever felt the Spirit's wounding and killing sword of conviction, they would flee from sin as from a lion or a bear. Truly forgiven sinners dread the appearance of evil as burnt children dread the fire.

Superficial repentance always leads to careless living. Faith that was never bedewed with repentance never brings forth the flowers of holiness. Pray earnestly for a broken heart. Remember it is the contrite spirit which God is pleased with. Do not believe that you can have ground for rejoicing if you never saw reason for lamenting. The promised comfort is only secured to those who have been mourners. (Matt. v. iv.)

Next to this seek for *real faith.* Many things which men call faith are not the precious faith of God's elect. Sincere trust in Jesus Christ is counterfeited in a thousand ways, and often imitated so accurately that only by rigid self-examination shall you discover the cheat. Ye must lie flat upon Christ, the Rock; ye must depend entirely upon him, all your hope and all your trust must be in him. If you believe with the heart, and not nominally, you are safe, but not otherwise. You must have true repentance and real faith, or ye are foolish builders.

Furthermore, seek an *inwrought experience of divine truth.* Ask to have it burnt into you. Why is it that people give up the doctrines of grace if they fall in with eloquent advocates of free will? Why is it they renounce the orthodox creed if they meet with smart reasoners who contradict it? Because they have never received the word in the power of the Holy Spirit so as to have it sealed in their hearts. I tremble for our churches now that false doctrine is rife, because I fear that many are not established in the truth. I pray the Lord for you, my dear flock, that you may know the truth by being taught of the Lord, for then you will not be led aside. The thieves and robbers will come, but as Christ's sheep you will not hear them. It is one thing to have a creed; it is quite another thing to have the truth graven upon the tables of the heart. Many fail here because truth was never experimentally made their own.

Pray, moreover, that your *faith may produce personal holiness.* Do not believe yourself to be saved from sin while you are living in sin. If you can find pleasure in the lusts of the flesh, you are no child of God. If you are given to drunkenness—and, mark you, many professors are so, only they drink at home and are not seen in the streets—how dwelleth the grace of God in you? If you delight in idle songs, and frequenting of places of vain amusement, you need not be long in weighing yourself, you are found wanting already. If you were renewed in the spirit of your mind, you would no more love these things than an angel would. There must be a new-born nature implanted, and where there is not this exemplified in holiness of life, you may build ever so high and prate ever so loudly about your building, it is a poor miserable shanty after all, and will fall in the last hurricane.

Want of depth, want of sincerity, want of reality in religion—this is the want of our times. Want of an eye to God in religion, lack of sincere dealing with one's own soul, neglect of using the lancet with our hearts, neglect of the search warrant which God gives out against sin, carelessness concerning living upon Christ; much reading about him, much talking about him, but too little feeding upon his flesh, and drinking of his blood—these are the causes of tottering professions and baseless hopes.

Thus have I tried to open up the parable: and I have not designed to discourage any sincere soul, my aim has been to say to you, "Make your calling and election sure. Build on Christ's love, sincerity, desire, the work of the Holy Spirit, and be not deceived."

III. So now I come, in the third place, to notice THE COMMON TRIAL OF THE TWO HOUSES.

Whether your religion be true or not, it will be tried; whether it be chaff or wheat, the fan of the Great Winnower will surely be brought into operation upon all that lies on the threshing-floor. If thou hast dealings with God, thou hast to do with a "consuming fire.' Whether thou be really or nominally a Christian, if thou comest near to Christ he will try thee as silver is tried. Judgment must begin at the house of God, and if thou darest to come in to the house of God, judgment will begin with thee. By the way, let us note that, if there are such trials for those who profess to be Christians, what will become of you who make no profession? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where will the ungodly and the wicked appear? If judgment begin with the house of God what will the end be of them that believe not? Terrible thought! But to return. Trials will come to profession, whether it be true or false. If I do not mistake the reference in the text to rain, flood, wind, these trials will be of three sorts at least. The rain typifies *afflictions from heaven.* God will send you adversities like showers, tribulations as many as the drops of the dew. Between now and heaven, O professor, you will feel the pelting storm. Like other men, your body will be sick; or if not, you shall have trouble in your house; children and friends will die, or riches will take to themselves wings, and fly like an eagle towards heaven. You must have trials from God's hand; and, if you are not relying on Christ, you will not be able to bear them. If you are not, by real faith, one with Jesus Christ, even God's rain will be too much for you. But there will also arise *trials from earth*—"the floods came." In former days the floods of persecution were more terrible than now, but persecution is still felt; and if you are a professor, you will have to bear a measure of it. Cruel mockings are still used against the people of God. The world no more loves the true church to-day than it did in the olden times. Can you bear slander and reproach for Jesus? Not unless you are firmly rooted and grounded. In the day of temptation and persecution the rootless plants of the stony ground are withered away. See ye to this. Then there will come *mysterious trials* typified by "the winds." The prince of the power of the air will assail you, with blasphemous suggestions, horrible temptations, or artful insinuations. He knows how to cast clouds of despondency over the human spirit; he can attack the four corners of the house at once by his mysterious agency; he can tempt us in divers ways at the same time, and drive us to our wits' end. Woe to thee, then, unless thou hast something to hold by better than the mere sand of profession!

Where there is a good foundation trials will do no hurt, but where there is no foundation they will frequently bring the man's profession down in ruin, even in this life. How many lose their religion at the very outset! Pliable and Christian both set out for the Celestial City, both aspiring to the crown of gold; but they fell into the Slough

of Despond, and then, as one of them struggled out on the side nearest his own house, and went back to the City of Destruction, while the other strove manfully to reach the further shore, the difference between the wise and foolish pilgrim was made manifest.

After Christians have proceeded further they will be tried in other ways. Infidelities often try Christians, I mean doubts about the essentials of the faith, and all its doctrines; and those that are not well cemented to the rock are easily moved to unbelief. This is the age of infidelities, but they who are on the rock by a truthful experience are not moved. A negro was once told by a friend that some man had said the Bible was not true. Now, our poor friend had never thought anybody could doubt the Bible, but his quick way of disposing of the novel difficulty was, "Dat book not true! why, I take it into my house and I sit down and read it, and it make my heart laugh. How can it be a lie dat make my heart laugh? I was drunkard, thief, and liar, and dat book talked to me and made me a new man—dat book no lie." The very best proof in the world surely, at least to the man himself, if not to others. We who have had our hearts made to laugh by God's word cannot be laughed out of our faith. We have lived on the word and proved its truthfulness by experience, and are therefore invulnerable to all attacks, whilst strangers to such experience are staggered.

Where the heart is really grounded upon the truth, you will find that heresies as well as infidelities, have but little effect. The sound Christian is like a stone, if he is thrown into the pool of false doctrine, he may be wetted by it, but he does not receive it into his inner self, whereas the unsound professor is like a sponge, he sucks it all in greedily, and retains what he absorbs.

How many there are who are tried by worldliness, and if their religion be but mere profession, worldliness soon eats the heart of it as doth a canker, and they become even as others! If, however, the Christian man's heart is right with God, he comes out and is separate, and the pride of life does not entrap him.

In cases of backsliding, where there is a sound heart towards God, the backslider is soon brought back, but where the heart is rotten, the backslider goes from bad to worse. I was struck with a story of two men who were accustomed to give exhortations at meetings, who had fallen out with each other, and one of their brethren, who grieved to think two servants of God should be at difference with each other, went to reconcile them. He called upon the first, and said, "John, I am very sorry to find you and James have quarrelled. It seems a great pity, and it brings much dishonour on the church of God." "Ah," said John, "I am very grieved, too, and what grieves me most is, that I am the sole cause of it. It was only because I spoke so bitterly, that James took offence." "Ah, ah," said the good man, "we will soon settle this difficulty, then," and away he went to James. "James, I am very sorry that you and John cannot agree." "Yes," he said, "it is a sad thing we don't, we ought to do so, for we are brethren; but what troubles me most is, that it is all my fault. If I had not taken notice of a little word John said, there would have been an end of it." The matter, as you may guess, was soon rectified. You see there was at bottom a true friendship between them, so that the little difficulty was soon got over, and so

where there is a true union between God and the soul, the backsliding will soon be recovered.

IV. To close. Having thus mentioned the common trials and the effects produced in this life, let me now remind you of the DIFFERENT RESULTS OF THE TRIALS in reference to the life to come.

In the one case, the rain descended very heavily, and threatened to wash the house away, but it was built on a rock, and not only did the house stand, but the man inside found great comfort in it. He could hear the pelting torrent beating on the roof, and sit and sing; when the gusts came against the windows he would only be the more happy to think he had such a shelter. Then came the floods. They would, if they could, have sapped and undermined the foundations, but they took no effect on the granite rock, and though the wind howled round the habitation, every stone was well cemented, and all bound as with iron bands to the grand old rock, and therefore the man was safe and happy within, and above all, grateful that he had built on such a foundation. He could sit down and sing—

> "Loud may the troubled ocean roar,
> In sacred peace my soul abides."

The Christian rests peacefully upon Christ. Troubles come one after another, but they do not sweep him away, they only endear to him the hope which is based upon Christ Jesus. And when at last death comes, that awful flood which will undermine everything that can be removed, it cannot find anything to shake in the wise builder's hope. He rests on what Christ has done; death cannot affect that. He believes in a faithful God; and dying cannot affect that. He believes in the covenant signed, and sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well. He lays hold on the "shalls" and "wills" of an immutable God, all sealed with the blood of the Redeemer; death cannot affect any of these. And when the last great trumpet sounds, and the last fire that shall try every man's work of what sort it is, comes forth from the throne of God, the man who in true sincerity and with real experience has laid hold on Christ, is not afraid of the tremendous hour. What though the trumpet sounds exceeding loud and long, and the dead awake, and the angels gather round the great white throne, and the pillars of heaven tremble, and the earth is dissolved, and the elements melt with fervent heat! the man of God feels that the rock on which he has built can never fail him, and the hope that grace has given him can never be removed. He smiles serenely amid it all.

But look at the case of the man whose hope is built on the sand! He could hardly endure the trials of life; he almost fell under common temptation; he turned his coat during the hour of persecution; but sorer trials now await him. Some hypocrites have been bolstered up even in the last moments, and perhaps have never known that they were lost till they felt they were; like Dives, of whom it is written, "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment." He had never lift up his eyes before; he did not know his condition till he actually realised it in all its misery. But the most of men who have come under the sound of the gospel, and made a profession, if they have been deceivers find it out at death, and it must be a dreadful thing to make that

discovery when pain is sharp and parting is bitter. Ah! dear friend, if you be mistaken may you find it out now, and not on your dying couch. May your prayer be, "Lord, show me the worst of my case. If my profession has been a mistake, O let me not build up and prop up a rotten thing, but help me to build aright upon the Rock of Ages." Do pray that prayer, I beseech you. Remember if death should not teach you the whole truth of your case, judgment will. There will be no mistake there, and no opportunity for repentance. This fallen house was never built again; there was no salvage from the total wreck. Lost, lost, lost, there is no word to follow; for once lost, lost for ever! O dear hearer, I bid thee if thou hast a name to live and art dead, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life. I pray thee if thou be a seeker, be not put off with empty hopes and vain confidences. Buy the truth and sell it not. Lay hold on eternal life. Seek the true Saviour and be not content till thou hast him, for if lost thy ruin will be terrible. Oh, *that lake!* Have you ever read the words, "Shall be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death"? The lake of fire! and souls cast into it! The imagery is dreadful. "Ah," says one, "that is a metaphor." Yes, I know it is, and a metaphor is but a shadow of the reality. Then, if the shadow be a lake of fire, what must the reality be? If we can hardly bear to think of a "worm that never dieth," and a "fire that never shall be quenched," and of a lake whose seething waves of fire that dash o'er undying and hopeless souls, what must hell be in very deed? The descriptions of Scriptures are, after all, but condescensions to our ignorance, partial revealings of fathomless mysteries; but if these are so dreadful, what must the full reality be? Provoke it not, my hearers, tempt not your God, neglect not the great salvation, for if you do, you shall not escape. Play not with your souls, be not heedless and careless of the realities of eternity; but now, even now, may God hear your prayer as you breathe it from your inmost souls, and give you truly to be washed in the precious blood, and effectually saved by him, in whom there is fulness of truth and grace. Amen.

My God, I mark with fear
How many hopes decay,
And like the foolish builder's house
Fall in the trial day.

Perhaps amid this throng
Thou dost a soul espy
Whose towering hopes are built on sand,
I ask, "Lord, is it I?"

A thousand doubts arise,
I bring them all to thee;
Am I unconsciously deceived?
Lord, search my heart and see.

O teach me deep to dig
Down to the solid rock,
That when tornadoes round me sweep
My house may bear the shock.

Jesus, thou only art
The sure foundation stone,
Firm as th' eternal hills art thou,
I build on thee alone.

Cemented fast to thee
No stone is laid in vain,
My hope defies th' assaults of hell,
The flood, the wind, the rain.

On Laying Foundations

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great"—Luke vi. 46–49.

THESE parables describe two classes of hearers; but they say nothing of those who are not hearers. Their position and prospects we must infer from what is said of hearers. Our Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world to tell us of the Father's love, and never man spake as he spake, and yet there are many who refuse to hear him. I do not mean those who are far away, to whom the name of Jesus is well-nigh unknown, but I mean persons in this land, and especially in this great and highly-favoured city, who wilfully refuse to hear him whom God has anointed to bring tidings of salvation. Our Lord Jesus is proclaimed, I was about to say, upon the house-tops in this city; for even in their music-halls and theatres Christ is preached to the multitude, and at the corners of our streets his banner is lifted up; and yet there are tens of thousands to whom the preaching of the gospel is as music in the ears of a corpse. They shut their ears and will not hear, though the testimony be concerning God's own Son, and life eternal, and the way to escape from everlasting wrath. To their own best interests, to their eternal benefit, men are dead: nothing will secure their attention to their God. To what, then, are these men like? They may fitly be compared to the man who built no house whatever, and remained homeless by day and shelterless by night. When worldly trouble comes like a storm those persons who will not hear the words of Jesus have no consolation to cheer them; when sickness comes they have no joy of heart to sustain them under its pains; and when death, that most terrible of storms, beats upon them they feel its full fury, but they cannot find a hiding place. They neglect the housing of their souls, and when the hurricane of almighty wrath shall break forth in the world to come they will have no place of refuge. In vain will they call upon the

rocks to fall upon them, and the mountains to cover them. They shall be in that day without a shelter from the righteous wrath of the Most High. Alas, that any being who wears the image of man should be found in such a plight! Homeless wanderers in the day of tempest! How my soul grieves for them! Yet, what excuse will those men invent who have refused even to know the way of salvation? What excuse can the tenderest heart make for them? Will they plead that they could not believe? Yet they may not say that they could not hear; and faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Oh my friend, if the word of God comes to you, and you decline to hear it, and therefore do not believe in Jesus, but die in your sins, what is this but soul-suicide? If a man die of a disease when infallible medicine is to be had, must not his death lie at his own door? If a man perish of hunger when bread is all around him and others feed to the full, and he will not have it, will any man pity him? Surely not a drop of pity will be yielded to a lost soul wherewith he may assuage the torment of his conscience, for all holy intelligences will perceive that the sinner chose his own destruction. This shall ever press upon the condemned conscience, "You knew the gospel, but you did not attend to it: you knew that there was salvation, and that Christ was the Saviour, and that pardon was proclaimed to guilty men, but you would not afford time from your farm and from your merchandise, from your pleasures and from your sins, to learn how you could be saved. That which cost God so dear you treated as a trifle. Ah, my dear friends, may none of you belong to the non-hearing class. It is not to such that I shall this morning address myself, and yet I could not enter upon my discourse without a word of loving expostulation with them. Let me part with them by quoting the warning word of the Holy Spirit, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."

Our earnest attention will now be given to those who are hearers of the word, and are somewhat affected by it. All hearers are builders of houses for their souls: they are each one doing something to set up a spiritual habitation. Some of these go a considerable distance in this house-building, and even crown the structure by publicly confessing Christ. They say unto him, "Lord, Lord": they meet with his followers, and join with them in reverence to the Master's name; but they do not obey the Lord; they hear him, but they fail to do the things which he says. Hence they are mistaken builders, who fail in the foundation, and make nothing sure except that their house will come down about their ears. Others there are, and we trust they will be found to be many among us, who are building rightly, building for eternity; constructing a dwelling-place with basis of rock, and walls of well-built stone, of which the Lord Christ is both foundation and corner-stone.

I am anxious to speak at this time to those who are just beginning to build for eternity. I am indeed happy to know that there are many such among us. May the Holy Spirit bless this sermon to them.

I. Our first subject will be A COMMON TEMPTATION WITH SPIRITUAL BUILDERS. A common temptation with hearers of the word, according

to the two parables before us, is to neglect foundation-work, to get hurriedly over the first part of the business, and run up the building quickly. They are tempted to assume that all is done which is said to be done; to take it for granted that all is right which is hoped to be right; and then to go on piling up the walls as rapidly as possible. The great temptation, I say, with young beginners in religious life, is to scamp the foundation, and treat those things lightly which are of the first importance. The same temptation comes to us throughout the whole of life, but to young beginners it is especially perilous: Satan would have them neglect the fundamental principles upon which their future hope and character are to rest, so that in a future trying hour, from want of a solid foundation, they may yield to evil, and lose the whole of their life-building.

This temptation is all the more dangerous, first, because *these young beginners have no experience.* Even the most experienced child of God is often deceived; how much more the pilgrim who has but just entered the wicket-gate! The tried saint sometimes mistakes that for a virtue which is only a gilded fault, and he fancies that to be genuine which is mere counterfeit; how, then, without any experience whatever, can the mere babe in grace escape deception unless he be graciously preserved? Newly awakened, and rendered serious, earnest hearts get to work in the divine life with much hurry, seizing upon that which first comes to hand, building in heedless haste, without due care and examination. Something must be done, and they do it without asking whether it is according to the teaching of the Lord. They call Jesus "Lord"; but they do what others say rather than what Jesus says. Satan is sure to be at hand at such times that he may lead the young convert to lay in place of gospel repentance a repentance that needs to be repented of, and instead of the faith of God's elect a proud presumption or an idle dream. For that love of God which is the work of the Spirit of God he brings mere natural affection for a minister; and he says, "There, that will do: you must have a house for your soul to dwell in. There are the materials, pile them up." Like children at play upon the beach, the anxious heap up their sand-castles, and please themselves therewith, for they are ignorant of Satan's devices. I am for this cause doubly anxious to save my beloved young friends from the deceiver. The common temptation is, instead of really repenting, to *talk about* repentance; instead of heartily believing, to *say*, "I believe," without believing; instead of truly loving, to talk of love, without loving; instead of coming to Christ, to speak about coming to Christ, and profess to come to Christ, and yet not to come at all. The character of Talkative in Pilgrim's Progress is ably drawn. I have met the gentleman many times, and can bear witness that John Bunyan was a photographer before photography was invented. Christian said of him "He talketh of prayer, of repentance, of faith, and of the new birth; but he knows but only to *talk* of them. I have been in his family, and his house is as empty of religion as the white of an egg is of savour." We have too many such persons around us who are, as to what they say, everything that is to be desired, and yet, by what they are proven to be, mere shams. As tradesmen place dummies in their shops, papered and labelled to look like goods, while yet they are nothing of the sort, so are these men marked and labelled as Christians,

but the grace of God is not in them. Oh that you young beginners may be on the alert, that you be not content with the form of godliness, but are made to feel the power of it.

There is this to help the temptation too, that *this plan for the present saves a great deal of trouble.* Your mind is distressed, and you want comfort; well, it will comfort you to say, "Lord, Lord," though you do not the things that Christ says. If you admit the claims of Jesus to be Lord, even though you do not believe on him for salvation, and so neglect the main thing which he commands, yet you will find some ease in the admission. He bids you repent of sin, trust his blood, love his word, and seek after holiness; but it is much easier to admire these things without following after them in your life. To feign repentance and faith is not difficult, but genuine godliness is heart-work, and requires thought, care, sincerity, prayerfulness, and watchfulness. Believe me, real religion is no sport. He that would be saved will find it to be no jesting matter. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence"; and he that is easy about the thing, and thinks it is nothing more than the conjuror's "Heigh, presto, done," has made a fatal mistake. "Strive," saith Christ, "to enter into the strait gate." The Spirit striveth in us mightily, and often works us to an agony. The crown of eternal glory is not won without fighting, nor the prize of our high calling received without running; yet by just making a holy profession, and by practising an outward form, a man imagines that the same result is produced as by seeking the Lord with his whole heart, and believing in the Lord Jesus. If it were so, there would be a fine broad road to heaven, and Satan himself would turn pilgrim. Believe me, dear hearers, this saving of trouble will turn out to be a making of trouble, and, before matters end, the hardest way will turn out to be the easiest way.

This kind of building without foundation has this advantage to back up the temptation,—*it enables a man to run up a religion very quickly.* He makes splendid progress. While the anxious heart is searching after truth in the inward parts, and begging to be renewed by grace, his exulting friend is as happy as he can be in a peace which he has suddenly obtained without question or examination. This rapid grower never asks, "Has my religion changed my conduct? Is my faith attended by a new nature? Does the Spirit of God dwell in me? Am I really what I profess to be, or am I but a bastard professor after all?" No, he puts aside all enquiry as a temptation of the devil. He takes every good thing for granted, and votes that all is gold which glitters. See how fast he goes! The fog is dense, but he steams through it, heedless of danger! He has joined the church: he has commenced work for God: he is boasting of his own attainments: he hints that he is perfect. But is this mushroom building safe? Will it pass muster in the last great survey? Will it stand should a tempest happen? The chimney-shaft is tall, but is it safe? Ay, there's the rub. This is the question which makes an end of much of the boasting which is all around us. It is better to tremble at God's word than boldly to presume. It is better to be fearful, lest after all we may be castaways, than to harden one's forehead with vain confidence. When a man travels upon a wrong road, the faster he runs the further he will go astray. Remember the

advice to hasten slowly, and the old proverb which saith, "The more haste the less speed." If you build quickly because you build without a foundation, your time and toil are thrown away.

How common, how deceptive is this temptation! For the young beginner, the man who is just aroused to seek the Lord, will find *a great many to help him in his mistake*, should he neglect the foundation. Kind, good, Christian friends often, without a thought of doing so, help to mislead seeking souls. "Yes," they say, "you are converted," and so perhaps the person would be if all he said was true; but then it is said without feeling; it comes from the lip only, and does not come from the heart; and therefore it is ruinous to encourage him. A kindly assurance from a Christian friend may breed false confidence, if that assurance was mistakenly given. In these days we do not meet with many Christians who err by dealing too severely with converts; the shot strikes the other target. Our forefathers were possibly too suspicious and jealous; but nowadays we nearly all err in the opposite direction: we are so anxious to see everybody brought to Christ, that our wish may tend to delude us into the belief that it is so. We are so willing to cheer and comfort those who seek the Lord, that we may fall into the habit of prophesying smooth things, and thus shun everything which tends to probe and test, lest it should also discourage. Let us beware lest we cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. It will be a sad thing to breed hypocrites when we were looking for converts. I have heard of one who had been into the Enquiry Room a dozen times, and when on another occasion she was invited to go there she said, "I really do not know why I should go, for I have been told that I was saved twelve times already, and I am not a bit better than before they told me so." It would be better to send some home weeping rather than rejoicing. Many a wound needs the lancet more than the plaster. You may be comforted by well-meant assurances of tender friends, and yet that comfort may be all a lie. I therefore warn you against any peace except that which comes from doing that which Jesus commands, or in other words, against any confidence except that which rests in Jesus only, and is attended with repentance, faith, and a life of obedience to your Lord.

No doubt many are encouraged in slight building by the fact that *so many professors are making a fair show, and yet their building is without foundation.* We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that in all churches there are persons who have no depth of spiritual root, and we are afraid no real spiritual life. We cannot root them up, though we fear that they are tares, for we are assured that we should unavoidably root up the wheat with them, and this our Master forbids. There is nothing about their outward conduct which we could lay hold upon as a proof of their being deceivers, and yet a cold chill runs through us when we talk with them, for they have no warmth, and no life, and nothing of the Lord about them. We miss in their conversation that sweet spirituality, that holy unction, that blessed humility, which are sure to be present when men are truly familiar with the Lord, and have entered into living union with him. People of this order mix up with us in our holy convocations, and when they come across the newly-awakened ones, they talk of divine things in such an off-hand and flippant manner

that they do serious mischief. They speak about conversion as if it were a mere trifle, a matter as easy as kissing your hand; and so those who are hopeful, and over whom our hearts are yearning, are turned aside by them. Young people are apt to think, "So-and-so is a member of the church, and he is never very precise. If a lukewarm profession satisfies him, why should it not satisfy me!" Ah, my dear friends, but you would not say so in business. If you knew a man was trading without capital and likely to come to bankruptcy, you would not say, "I may do the same." If you saw a man venturing into deep water who could not swim, and you felt sure that he would ultimately sink, you would not follow his example and be drowned too. No, no; let these frothy professors be beacons to you. Get away from Mr. Talkative, lest he make you as hollow a drum as himself. Beware of loose professors, who are as wreckers' lights that lure men upon the rocks. Make sure work for eternity, and bid triflers begone.

Again, there is always at the back of all this an inducement to build without a foundation because *it will not be known, and possibly may not be found out for years.* Foundation-work is quite out of sight, and the house can be got up and be very useful in a great many ways, and it may stand a good while without the underground work; for houses without foundations do not tumble down at once; they will stand for years; nobody knows how long they may keep up; perhaps they may even be inhabited with comfort till the last great flood. Death alone will discover some impostures. Hence, because the ill-founded house will do for the present, and can be used, and may bring immediate comfort, many people consider it economical to leave out the foundation as a needless superfluity. If they are questioned as to their vital godliness they grow angry:—"What business have you to enter into my private business? Why should you meddle with the secrets of my soul?" Ah, dear friend, if we were cruel to you, and wished you to be deceived, we would hold our tongues, or speak to you with the voice of flattery; but as we love you, and as we hope to be blessed in years to come through your true and holy consecration to Christ, we are intensely earnest that you should begin aright. We would have you build that which will not need to be pulled down again, work that will stand when the waters are out and the stream beats vehemently upon it. I dread that any man should perish without religion, but I dread far more that any man should perish with it, finding his faith to have been false after all. If you do build, build what is worth building: if you must be builders for your souls, and surely you must, or else be shelterless, then take heed on what foundation you build, and be careful what ye build thereon, lest after all you suffer the loss of all your labour in that last tremendous day. How sad it will seem to dwell near the gates of heaven, and spend your lives among those who are to be its future inhabitants, and then for want of sincerity and truth to be shut out of the celestial city. How terrible to find out by experience that there is a back way to the gates of hell even from the gates of heaven. God grant it be not so with one of us here present. O ye builders, care not merely for the present, but build for death, and judgment, and eternity!

This part of our discourse is not only for young people, but for us all—for old as well as young. Depend upon it, there is not one man among

us but what has need to search himself, and see whether the foundation of his faith has been truly laid or no.

II. So I advance to the second step, and there we will consider A WISE PRECAUTION WHICH SAFE BUILDERS NEVER FORGET. They dig deep, and never rest till they get a good substantial foundation: they are glad to get to the bottom of all the loose earth and to build on the rock. Let me commend this wise precaution to all of you.

Follow the text and learn to see to your *sincerity*. The Lord Jesus says "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" May the Holy Ghost make you true to the core. Be afraid to say a word more than you feel. Never permit yourself to speak as if you had an experience of which you have only read. Let not your outward worship go a step beyond the inward emotion of your soul. If Christ be truly your Lord you will obey him: if he be not your Lord do not call him so. It is a great point in all your religious thoughts, beliefs, words, and acts to have the heart moving in all. It is an awful thing to make a high profession of sanctity, and yet live in the indulgence of secret vice: such persons will listen to my observation and commend me for my faithfulness, and yet continue in their hypocrisy. This is most painful. These men can speak the Jew's language, and yet the tongue of Babylon is more natural to them: they follow Christ, but their hearts are with Belial. Ah, me! My soul is sick at the thought of them. Be true! Be true! If truth will carry you no further than despair, better that you stop in despair than gain a hope by a lie. Do not live on fiction, profession, presumption. Eat ye that which is good, and feed only upon the truth. Remember that when you build with the wood, hay, and stubble of mere notion you are only gathering materials for your own funeral pile in that day when the fire shall devour all lovers and makers of a lie. Be true as steel! Every wise builder for his soul must mind that.

The next thing is *thoroughness*. For observe, according to our Lord, the wise builder digged deep. You cannot do a right thing too well. Dig deep if you do dig a foundation. If it be repentance, let it be an intensely earnest repentance, including a vehement hatred of every form of sin. If you make confession before God, confess with your very soul, and not with your lips only: lay bare your spirit before the glance of Deity. If it be faith that you talk of, believe right up to the hilt. Do not go in for that kind of sceptical believing which is so common nowadays. If thou believest, believe: if thou repentest, repent. In the purging of the soul there is nothing like sweeping out every particle of the old leaven of falsehood; and in bringing in the good things into the heart there is nothing like bringing in everything that Christ prescribes, that of his fulness we may receive, not only grace, but grace for grace, grace upon grace, all the grace that is needed. Be downright in everything. The wise builder dug through the earth, and continued his digging till he reached the rock; and then he dug into the rock, and struck out a trench wherein he might lay his foundation; for he could not be content unless he made sure and thorough work of it. Sincerity and thoroughness are fine building-materials.

Next to that add *self-renunciation;* for that is in the parable. When a man digs a deep foundation he has much earth to throw out. So he

that builds for eternity has a great deal to get rid of. Self-trust must go at the beginning; love of sin must follow; worldliness, pride, self-seeking, all sorts of iniquity,—these must be cast aside. There is very much rubbish, and the rubbish must go. You cannot make sure work for eternity without clearing away much which flesh and blood would like to retain. See ye to this, and count the cost.

Then must come *solid principle.* The man who is determined that if he does build he will build securely, digs down to the rock. He says, "I believe in God, he is my helper. I believe in Christ Jesus, and on his atoning sacrifice and living intercession I build my eternal hopes. I also build on the doctrine of grace, for the Lord hath said it,—By grace are ye saved, through faith. I build on Scripture: nothing but the warrant of the word will do for me." What God has said is a rock: what man teaches is mere shifting sand. What a blessed thing it is to get down to the eternal principles of divine verity! You that pick up your religion from your mothers and fathers; you that follow it because it happened to be in the family; what are you worth in the day of trouble? You are blown down like a booth, or a hut of boughs. But you that know what you believe, and why you believe it, you who, when you put your foot down, know what you are standing upon, and are persuaded that you have firm rock beneath you; you are the men who will stand fast when mere pretenders are hurled out of their place. Oh, my dear seeking friends, fix upon true principles, and be not content with falsehood.

These truthful principles must be *firmly adhered to.* Bind your building to the rock. A house will not stand merely because it is *on* the rock; you must get its foundation into the rock. The house must take a grip of the rock, and the rock must grasp the house. The more you can get the house to be a bit of the rock, and the rock, as it were, to grow up into the house, the more secure you are. It is of no use saying, "Yes, I confide in Christ, in grace, in revelation," unless your very life enters into these things, and they enter into you. Hypocrites, Job says, are stolen away in the night; so easily are they removed. The inventor of some new notion comes along, cracks up his novel wares, and silly souls are at once taken in by him. Christ may go, grace may go, and the Bible may go, too: their new master has them wholly in his power. We want not such unsubstantial men; we care not for these speculating builders whose carcases are all around us. We have had enough of castles in the air: we need true men, who will stand fast like the mountains while errors, like clouds, blow over them. Remember the huge shaft at Bradford, and how many were slain by its fall, and let it teach you to hold hard to foundation truths, and never depart from them.

The man in the second parable did not build as he should; what may I say of him? I will say three words. First, he was a man who had *nothing out of sight:* you could see all his house when you looked at it. If you can see all a man's religion at a glance he has no religion worth having. Godliness lies most in secret prayer, private devotion, and inward grace. The wise builder had the most costly part of his house buried in the ground; but the other man showed all that he had above ground. He is a poor tradesman who has no stock but that which he puts into the window. He will not last long who has no capital. He

cannot long stand who has no backbone within. Beware of a religion of show.

Next, this man had *nothing to hold to.* He built a house, but it stood upon the loose soil: he easily dug into that, and stuck up his house; but his walls had no holdfast. Beware of a religion without holdfasts. But if I get a grip upon a doctrine they call me a bigot. Let them do so. Bigotry is a hateful thing, and yet that which is now abused as bigotry is a great virtue, and greatly needed in these frivolous times. I have been inclined lately to start a new denomination, and call it "the Church of the Bigoted." Everybody is getting to be so oily, so plastic, so untrue, that we need a race of hard-shells to teach us how to believe. Those old-fashioned people who in former ages believed something, and thought the opposite of it to be false, were truer folk than the present time-servers. I should like to ask the divines of the broad school whether any doctrine is worth a man's dying for it. They would have to reply, "Well, of course, if a man had to go to the stake or change his opinions, the proper way would be to state them with much diffidence, and to be extremely respectful to the opposite school." But suppose he is required to deny the truth? "Well, there is much to be said on each side, and probably the negative may have a measure of truth in it as well as the positive. At any rate, it cannot be a prudent thing to incur the odium of being burned, and so it might be preferable to leave the matter an open question for the time being." Yes, and as these gentlemen always find it unpleasant to be unpopular, they soften down the hard threatenings of Scripture as to the world to come, and put a colour upon every doctrine to which worldly-wise men object. The teachers of doubt are very doubtful teachers. A man must have something to hold to, or he will neither bless himself nor others. Bring all the ships into the pool; but do not moor or anchor one of them; let each one be free! Wait you for a stormy night, and they will dash against each other, and great mischief will come of this freedom. Perfect love and charity will not come through our being all unmoored, but by each having his proper moorings and keeping to them in the name of God. You must have something to hold to; but the builder in the parable had not, and so he perished.

The foolish builder had *nothing to resist outward circumstances.* On summer days his house was a favourite resort, and was considered to be quite as good as his neighbour's in all repects. Frequently he rubbed his hands and said, "I do not see but what my house is quite as good as his, and perhaps a little better the fact is, I had a few pounds to spare which I did not bury in the ground as he did, and with it I have bought many a little ornament, so that my habitation has a finer look than his building." So it seemed; but when the torrent came raging down the mountain side, his building, having nothing wherewith to resist the violence of the flood, fell down at once, and not a trace of it remained, when the storm had ceased. Thus do men fail because they offer no resistance to forces which drive them into sin; the great current of evil finds in them victims, and not opponents.

III. Thirdly, we will now gather from our text A SET OF ARGUMENTS, URGING US TO TAKE CARE OF THE FOUNDATION. I will glance over these arguments, wishing much that I had time to enforce them. The

first is this. We ought to build with a good foundation at the beginning, because otherwise *we shall not build well in any other part of the house.* Bad work in the foundation influences all the rest of the courses. In the Revised Version at the end of the forty-eighth verse instead of, "For it was founded upon a rock," we read, "Because it had been well builded." The house was built well at the bottom, and that led the workman to put in good work all the way up, so that all through "it had been well builded." The other man built badly underground, and did the same up to the roof. When you get into the habit of slovenly work in secret the tendency is to be slovenly in public too. If the underground part of our religion is not firmly laid upon Christ, then in the upper part there will be rotten work, half-baked bricks, mud instead of mortar, and a general scamping of everything. When a great Grecian artist was fashioning an image for the temple he was diligently carving the back part of the goddess, and one said to him, "You need not finish that part of the statue, because it is to be built into the wall." He replied, "The gods can see in the wall." He had a right idea of what is due to God. That part of my religion which no man can see should be as perfect as if it were to be observed by all. The day shall declare it. When Christ shall come everything shall be made known, and published before the universe. Therefore see to it that it be fit to be thus made known.

See, again, that we ought to have good foundations when we *look at the situation whereon the house is to be built.* It is clear from this parable that both these houses were built in places not far from a river, or where streams might be expected to come. Certain parts of the South of France are marvellously like Palestine, and perhaps at the present moment they are more like what the Holy Land was in Christ's day than the Holy Land now is. When I reached Cannes last year I found that there had been a flood in the town. This flood did not come by reason of a river being swollen, but through a deluge of rain. A waterspout seems to have burst upon the hill-side tearing up earth, and rocks, and stones, and then hurrying down to the sea. It rushed across the railway station and poured down the street which led to it, drowning several persons in its progress. When I was there a large hotel—I should think five stories high—was shored up with timber, and was evidently doomed; for when this stream rushed down the narrow street it undermined the lower courses of the building, and as there were no foundations at all able to bear such a test the whole erection was rendered unsafe. The Saviour had some such case in his mind's eye. A torrent of water would come tearing down the side of the mountain, and if a house was built on the mere earth, it would be carried away directly, but if it were fastened into the rock so that it became part and parcel of it, then the flood might rush all around it, but it would not shake the walls. Beloved builder of a house for your soul, your house is so situated that one of these days there must come great pressure upon it. "How do you know?" Well, I know that the house wherein my soul lives is pitched just where winds blow, and waves rise, and storms beat. Where is yours? Do you live in a snug corner? Yes, but one of these times you will find that the snug corner will be no more shielded than the open riverside; for God so

orders providence that every man has his test sooner or later. It may be that you think yourself past temptation, but the idea is a delusion, as time will show. Perhaps from the very fact that you seem quite out of the way, a peculiar temptation may befall you. Therefore, I do pray you, because of the exposed condition of your life's building, build upon a good foundation.

The next argument is, build deep, because of the *ruin which will result from a bad foundation.* The foolish builder's house was without a foundation. Notice that word, "*without a foundation.*" Write down the expression, and see whether they apply to you or not. What happened to this house without a foundation? The stream beat vehemently on it. The river's bed had long been dry, but suddenly it was flooded, and the torrent rolled with tremendous power. Perhaps it was persecution, perhaps it was prosperity, perhaps it was trouble, perhaps it was temptation, perhaps it was prevalent scepticism, perhaps it was death; but, anyhow, the flood beat vehemently upon that house; and now we read the next word,—"And *immediately it fell.*" It did not stand a prolonged assault, it was captured at once. "Immediately it fell." What! in a minute, all that fair profession gone? "Immediately it fell." Why, that is the man I shook hands with the other Sunday, and called him "Brother," and he has been seen drunk! or he has been in the frivolous assembly, using unhallowed language! or he has become an utter doubter all on a sudden! It is sorrowful work burying our friends, but it is much more sorrowful work to lose them in this fashion: and yet so they vanish. They are gone: even as Job saith "the east wind carrieth him away and he departeth." "Immediately" they fall, and yet we thought so highly of them, and they thought so highly of themselves. "Immediately it fell"; their profession could not endure trial, and all because it had no foundation.

Then it is added, "And the ruin of that house was great." The house came down with a crash, and it was the man's all. The man was an eminent professor, and hence his ruin was all the more notable. It was a great fall because it could never be built up again. When a man dies a hypocrite certainly there is no hope of restitution for him. By the stream the very debris of the ruined house was swept away; nothing was left. Oh, men, if you lose a battle you may fight again and win another; if you fail in business you may start again in trade and realise a fortune; but if you lose your souls the loss is irretrievable. Once lost, lost for ever. There will be no second opportunity. Do not deceive yourselves about that. Therefore, dig deep, and lay every stone most firmly upon the foundation of rock.

For lastly, and perhaps this will be the best argument, *observe the effect of this good, sure building,* this deep building. We read that when the flood beat upon the wise man's house "*it could not shake it.*" That is very beautiful. Not only could it not carry it away, but "it could not shake it." I see the man: he lost his money and became poor, but he did not give up his faith: "It could not shake it." He was ridiculed and slandered, and many of his former friends gave him the cold shoulder; but "It could not shake it." He went to Jesus under his great trial and he was sustained: "It could not shake it." He was very sick and his spirit was depressed within him, but still he

held his confidence in Christ: "It could not shake it." He was near to die; he knew that he must soon depart out of this world, but all the pains of death and the certainty of dissolution could not shake him. He died as he lived, firm as a rock, rejoicing as much as ever, nay, rejoicing more, because he was nearer to the kingdom and to the fruition of all his hopes. "It could not shake it." It is a grand thing to have a faith which cannot be shaken. I saw one day a number of beech trees which had formed a wood: they had all fallen to the ground through a storm. The fact was they leaned upon one another to a great extent, and the thickness of the wood prevented each tree from getting a firm hold of the soil. They kept each other up and also constrained each other to grow up tall and thin, to the neglect of root-growth. When the tempest forced down the first few trees the others readily followed one after the other. Close to that same spot I saw another tree in the open, bravely defying the blast, in solitary strength. The hurricane had beaten upon it, but it had endured all its force unsheltered. That lone, brave tree seemed to be better rooted than before the storm. I thought, "Is it not so with professors?" They often hold together, and help each other to grow up, but if they have not firm personal roothold, when a storm arises they fall in rows. A minister dies, or certain leaders are taken away, and over go the members by departure from the faith and from holiness. I would have you be self-contained, growing each man into Christ for himself, rooted and grounded in love and faith and every holy grace. Then when the worst storm that ever blew on mortal man shall come, it will be said of your faith, "It could not shake it." I beseech you who are now seeking Christ to take care that you build well, that you may stand long in our Zion, steadfast and unmovable. God grant it for Christ's sake. Amen.

One Lost Sheep

"How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray"—Matthew xviii. 12, 13.

THIS passage occurs in a discourse of our Saviour against *despising one of those little ones that believe in him.* He foretells a dreadful doom for those who, in their contempt for the little ones, cause them to stumble; and he forbids that contempt by a variety of forcible arguments, upon which we cannot now dwell. There is a tendency, apparent at this present time, to think little of the conversion of individuals, and to look upon the work of the Holy Spirit upon each separate person as much too slow a business for this progressive age. We hear grand theories of a theocracy of a kind unknown to Holy Scripture: a semi-political dominion of the Lord over masses wherein the individuals are unregenerate. We listen to great swelling words about the uplifting of nations and the advancement of the race; but these lofty ideas do not produce facts, nor have they any moral power. Our "cultured" teachers, weary of the humdrum work of bringing individual souls into light; they pine to do it wholesale, by a far more rapid process than that of personal salvation. They are tired of the units, their great minds dwell upon "the solidarity of the race." I am bold to assert that if ever we despise the method of individual conversion, we shall get into an unsound order of business altogether, and find ourselves wrecked upon the rocks of hypocrisy. Even in those right glorious times when the gospel shall have the freest course, and shall run the most quickly, and be the most extensively glorified, its progress will still be after the former manner of the conviction, conversion, and sanctification of individuals, who shall each one believe and be baptized, according to the Word of the Lord.

I fear lest in any of you there should be even the least measure of despising the one lost sheep, because of the large and philosophical methods which are now so loudly cried up. I would not have you exchange the gold of individual Christianity for the base metal of

Christian Socialism. If the wanderers are to be brought in in vast numbers, as I pray they may be, yet must it be accomplished by the bringing of them in one by one. To attempt national regeneration without personal regeneration is to dream of erecting a house without separate bricks. In the vain attempt to work in the gross, we may miss the practical result which would have followed working in detail. Let us settle it in our minds that we cannot do better than obey the example of our Lord Jesus, given us in the text, and go after the one sheep which has gone astray.

Our text warns us that *we are not to despise one person, even on account of evil character.* The first temptation is to despise *one,* because only one; the next is to despise one, because that one is so little; the next, and perhaps the most dangerous, form of the temptation, is to despise one, because that one has gone astray. The individual is not in the right path, not obeying law, nor reflecting credit on the church, but doing much that vexes the spiritual, and grieves the holy; yet we are not, therefore, to despise him. Read the eleventh verse: "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." In the Greek, the word "lost" is a very strong word: we may read it, "that which is destroyed." It does not mean "that which is non-existent," as you will clearly see; but that which is destroyed as to usefulness to the shepherd, as to happiness to itself, and as to working out the intent for which it was created. If any are so effectually destroyed by sin that their existence is a greater calamity than their non-existence would have been; if they are now dead in trespasses and sins, and even offensive in character, yet must we not despise them. The Son of man did not despise such, since "He has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Many a soul that has been so destroyed as to be lost to itself, lost to God, lost to his people, lost to anything like hope and holiness, the Lord Jesus Christ has saved by his gracious power. *He values each one;* this is the lesson which I would teach this morning to the utmost of my power. May the Holy Spirit teach it also.

In considering the words of our Lord which are now before us, I beg you to notice, first, that *the Lord Jesus herein shows peculiar interest in one lost soul;* secondly, *he puts forth special exertion for the rescue of this lost one:* and thirdly, *he displays a special rejoicing when the lost one is restored.* When we have thought of all this, we shall then observe, fourthly, that *he sets us a very striking example,* herein teaching us to care for each soul destroyed by sin.

I. First, then, in the words before us, OUR SAVIOUR SHOWS PECULIAR INTEREST IN ONE LOST SOUL.

Note, in the commencement, that for the sake of those lost ones *our Lord assumes a special character.* The eleventh verse puts it, "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." He was not originally known as "the Son of man," but as "the Son of God." Before all worlds, he dwelt in the bosom of the Father, and "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." But in order to redeem men, the Son of the Highest became "the Son of man." He was born of the Virgin, and by birth inherited the innocent infirmities of our nature, and bore the sufferings incident to those infirmities. Then did he also take upon

himself our sin and its penalty, and therefore died upon the cross. He was in all points made like unto his brethren. He could not be the shepherd of men without becoming like to them, and therefore the Word condescended to be made flesh. Behold the stupendous miracle of incarnation! Nothing can excel this marvel—Immanuel, God with us! "Being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." O lost one, conscious of your loss, take heart to-day when the name of Jesus is named in your hearing; he is God, but he is man, and as God-and-man he saves his people from their sins.

Next to this, to show how Jesus values one lost soul, he *makes a very wonderful descent.* "The Son of man is come." He was always known as "The Coming One"; but as to the salvation of the lost he has actually come. For judgment he is "the coming one" still; but for salvation we rejoice that our Saviour has already come. Quitting the assemblies of the perfect, he has been here as the Friend of publicans and sinners. From being the Lord of angels, he has stooped to be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Yes, he has come; and not in vain. Those who preached the coming Saviour had such a joyous message to deliver that their feet were beautiful upon the mountains, and their voices were as heavenly music; but as for us who preach that he has come, and, coming, has finished the work which he undertook to perform—surely ours is the choicest of messages. Our Lord Jesus has completed the atoning sacrifice, and the justifying righteousness, by which lost men are saved: happy is the preacher of such tidings, and blessed are your ears that hear them! The good Shepherd has performed all that is necessary for the salvation of the flock which his Father has given into his hands. Beloved, let us take heart. Lost as we are, Christ has come to save us. He has come to the place of our ruin and woe. His coming and seeking will not be in vain. Brethren, how greatly ought we to value the souls of men when Jesus for their sake becomes a man, and comes into this sinful world among our guilty race that he may work the salvation of the lost!

Note, here, that *he does this for those that are still straying.* I have marked, in looking at the Greek text, that it is written, "He seeketh that which goeth astray." The Shepherd seeks while the sheep strays: seeks it because it strays and needs seeking. Full many of the Lord's redeemed are even now going astray, and even now is the Shepherd going after them. The Saviour seeks those who are even now sinning. That he should have a love to those who are repenting I can well understand; but that he should care for those who are wilfully going astray is far more gracious. Jesus seeks those whose backs are towards him, who are going further and further away from the fold; herein is grace most free, most full, most sovereign. Indeed it is so. Though thou dost harden thyself against the Lord, though thou dost refuse to turn at his rebuke, yet if thou be his redeemed, his eye of love marks thee; in all thy wilful wanderings he follows thee. He sees thee, he seeks thee; oh that thou mayest yield, and find that he saves thee! O ye that are now in the flock, think of the love of Christ to you when you were outside the fold; when you had no wish

to return; when, seeing him pursuing you, you only ran the faster to escape his almighty love! Let us sing together,

"Determined to save, he watched o'er my path,
When, Satan's blind slave, I sported with death."

Notwithstanding all my rebellion, and all my wilful transgression, he still loved me with his heart, and pursued me with his Word. Oh, how we ought to love sinners, since Jesus loved us, and died for us while we were yet sinners! We must care for drunkards while they still pass round the cup; swearers even while we hear them swear; and profligates while we mourn to see them polluting our midnight streets. We must not wait till we see some better thing in them, but feel an intense interest for them as what they are—straying and lost. When the sheep is torn with the thorns of the waste places, and is sick, and worn to skin and bones with long wanderings and hungerings, we must seek its restoration, though we see in it no desire to submit itself to the Shepherd's care and rule. Such was our Saviour's love to us: such be our love to lost ones.

The Shepherd takes a peculiar interest in the lost, not only as now straying, but as *having already gone very far away*. Carefully consider these words—"If so be that he find it." That "if" tells its own tale. The sheep had become so terribly lost that it was not likely to be found again: it had wandered into so dense a thicket, or strayed into so wild a region, that it seemed scarcely within the bounds of hope that it would ever be discovered and brought back. We do not often meet with an "if" in reference to the work of Christ; but here is one—"If so be that he find it." This does not show weakness in the Shepherd, but the desperate danger of the sheep. I have often heard it said, by those who come to confess Christ, and to acknowledge his love to them, that they are struck with wonder that they, above all others, should be doing any such thing. When we sit at the Lord's table, the feast is very wonderful; but the greatest wonder is the guest, when I am there. How humbly do we each one sing,

"Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter where there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

But it is so. The good Shepherd is to-day seeking many whose salvation seems highly improbable, if not utterly impossible. Herein is love that he should go after those whose finding is by no means a certainty, nor even a probability! Very improbable, almost impossible, is the task he undertakes! Yet in such he takes a deep interest.

Moreover, those toward whom our Lord has these thoughts of love have often sinned so as to have *brought themselves into the deadliest danger*. "For the Son of man is come *to save* that which was lost." Saving implies ruin, peril, jeopardy—yea, destruction already in a measure present. Are not many now playing with the fire of hell? For what is that unquenchable fire but sin, in its nature and results? Men are trifling on the brink of eternal woe: "Their foot shall slide in due time." Playing with edged tools is nothing in danger compared with sporting with your lusts; and many are doing so. Yet,

despite their danger, Jesus seeks them. See you not those sheep heedlessly feeding near the den of the wolf? In a little the monster will devour them. They are far away from home, and food, and rest, and safety. They have no desire to return; but they are resolved to roam yet further from the fold. The Lord Jesus comes after such desperately deluded ones. Until you pass the iron gate the gospel will invite you to return. If you be but one inch this side of hell, love will pursue you, and mercy will follow you. Our glorious David, while a lamb still lives, is able to rescue it from the jaw of the lion, and the paw of the bear. Though, like Jonah, a soul may have descended into the deeps, and may lie out of all human reach, yet a word from Jesus can bring it up from the lowest pit. Glory be to the blessed name of the Almighty Saviour, he is able to save to the uttermost: his power to save the lost is such that none are too vile for his salvation.

If we rightly consider the parable before us, we shall see that *he takes a special interest in these stray sheep because they are his own.* This man did not go after wild beasts, nor after other men's sheep; but he had a hundred sheep of his own, and when he had counted them, he missed one. The hireling, whose own the sheep are not, would have said, "We have nearly the hundred: we need not be particular about an odd one." But these hundred sheep belonged to the Shepherd himself; they were his own by choice, by inheritance, by divine gift, by glorious capture, and by costly purchase, and he could not accept ninety and nine for a hundred. "None of them is lost," saith he. "Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Jesus could not endure to report a loss upon the flock handed over to him of the Father. Ninety-nine is not a hundred, and the Saviour will not consider it such; for well he knows that "it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." Dear friends, since Jesus takes such an interest even in one stray soul, you must not think it little that you should be called to care for a single soul. Do not think that a little congregation of forty or fifty is too few to be worthy of your best efforts. Should your class, through various circumstances, get down to a very small number, do not, therefore, give it up. No, no. Value one soul more than a world's purchase. The full company of the redeemed is far from being made up as yet, and the Lord hath much people in this city not yet brought to his feet; therefore, never dream of ceasing your labours. Rest not till the hour shall come,

> "When all the chosen race
> Shall meet around the throne;
> Shall bless the conduct of his grace,
> And make his glories known."

II. Secondly, may the Spirit of God help me while I remind you that OUR LORD PUT FORTH SPECIAL EXERTION TO SAVE ONE SOLITARY INDIVIDUAL.

Observe in the parable—for it is a parable, though briefly told—that we see the Shepherd *leaving happier cares.* He felt himself at home

with his attached and faithful flock; they had not gone astray, and they gathered about him, and he fed them, and took pleasure in them. There is always a great deal to do with sheep: they have many diseases, many weaknesses, many needs; but when you have an attached, affectionate flock about you, you feel at home with them. So the great Shepherd describes himself as leaving the ninety and nine, his choice flock, the sheep that had fellowship with him, and he with them. Yes, he leaves those in whom he could take pleasure, to seek one that gave him pain. I will not dwell upon how he left the paradise above, and all the joy of his Father's house, and came to this bleak world; but I pray you remember that he did so. It was a wonderful descent when he came from beyond the stars to dwell on this beclouded globe, to redeem the sons of men. But, remember, he still continually comes by his Spirit. His errands of mercy are perpetual. The Spirit of God moves his ministers, who are Christ's representatives, to forego the feeding of the gathered flock, and to seek, in their discourses, the salvation of the wandering ones, in whose character and behaviour there is nothing to cheer us. My Master's heart is full of care for all that love him; he wears their names engraven on the jewels of his breast-plate; but yet his heart is always going forth afar, after those who have not yet been brought to him; and after those who once were in his fold, but have gone aside, and quitted the flock. He leaves the happy and the holy, and gives his best thoughts to the lost.

Our Lord *goes out to seek these.* It is not merely a sending forth of thought, it is a marching forth of power. His divine grace is going forth, I trust, this day, beyond the company whom he has called by his grace, to those other sheep, who are not yet of his fold, whom also he must bring in. He would not have his church expend all her care on the flock which he has led into her green pastures, but he would have her go afield after those who are not yet in her blest society.

According to the text, the Shepherd goes into the mountains: among difficulties and dangers. He will do and dare for the saving of the lost: no hardships can daunt his mighty love. You know through what dark ravines he passed in saving men. You have heard what climbing he had after proud souls, and what condescensions for despairing ones. A sheep in the East is more light of foot than our sheep; it will leap like a gazelle, and climb the mountains like a chamois; and so are sinners very swift in transgression, and very daring in presumption. They leap in their iniquities where the children of God would shudder to follow them even in thought. They make nothing of leaps of profanity which would curdle the blood of him that has been taught the fear of God at the feet of Jesus Christ. Yet the Lord Jesus went after these desperadoes. What difficulties he conquered, what sufferings he endured, what mountains he overleaped, that he might seek and save! O brethren, the same heart is in him still: he goes forth continually in the preaching of the Word. With many a sigh and many a groan on the part of his chosen ministers, he goes among the mountains to seek that which has gone astray. I pray that he may accept the effort of his unworthy servant this day, and bring some lost one home by means of this sermon.

To show his exertion for the lost, our Lord describes himself as *seeking with persevering diligence.* He looks this way, but sees nothing. He shades his eyes with his hand, and looks steadily! He thought he saw his sheep. There is surely a living object upon the hill-side! He gazes intently. No, it does not stir: it is a white rock! Possibly the lost sheep is in yonder gully! It is a long way to go, but he is so intent on his purpose that he is soon there; but the sheep is not to be seen. Where can it be? He travels on with swift foot, for he does not know what may become of his sheep while he delays. Every now and then he stops: he thinks he hears a bleating. Surely it is the voice of his sheep! He is mistaken. His love makes his ear the father of sounds which are not sounds at all. He has neither seen nor heard it these long hours; but he will continue seeking till he finds it. The concentrated omniscience of Christ is set upon a soul that goes astray, looking after it in all its evil desires and evil emotions; watching the growth of anything that looks like repentance; and observing with sorrow the hardening of its heart. This is what our Lord is doing for those redeemed with blood, who as yet have not been carried back to the fold. He puts forth a gracious exertion of eye and mind as well as of foot and hand, towards his wandering sheep.

At the last he saves—completely saves. He has not come to make the salvation of his people possible; but to save them. He has not come to put them in the way of saving themselves, but to save them. He has not come to half save them; but to save them altogether. When my Lord comes forth in the majesty of his sovereign grace to save a soul, he achieves his purpose, despite sin, and death, and hell. The wolf may grind his teeth, but the Shepherd is the wolf's master. The sheep itself may for a long time have wandered, and at the last may struggle against him; but he grips its feet, and throws the creature on his shoulders, and bears it home; for he is resolved to save it. The sheep is glad to be so borne, for with a touch the Shepherd moulds its will to his more perfect will. His grace is the triumphant energy by which the lost one is restored.

The salvation of a single soul is a mass of miracles. I have heard of a fire which consumed the shop of a jeweller, and a number of costly treasures of gold, and silver, and precious stones, were found among the ruins, caked into a conglomerate of riches. What a salvage! Such is the salvation of a single man, it is a mass of priceless mercies melted into one inestimable ingot, dedicated to the praise of the glory of his grace who makes us to be "accepted in the Beloved," and "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." When I think of the energy which is put forth by the Lord to save a single lost soul, I feel stirred in my heart, and I desire that your hearts should be stirred also, that we may put forth all our strength to go and find the Lord's lost ones. Let us co-operate with him in his great labour of seeking that which is lost. Oh, that the Holy Spirit may put such a spirit within us, and keep it there!

III. I am compelled to pass onward somewhat hurriedly. Notice, in the third place, that our Lord FEELS A SPECIAL REJOICING AT THE RECOVERY OF A WANDERING SHEEP. Do not make a mistake here. Do

not suppose that our Lord loves more the one soul that has wandered than the ninety and nine who have been preserved by his grace from going astray. Oh, no! he thinks ninety-nine times more of ninety-nine than of one; for his sheep are each one equally precious to him. We must not suppose that he looks upon any one soul of his redeemed with a tenderness ninety-nine times greater than he gives to another. But you will see the meaning of the passage by an illustration from your own experience. You have a family, and you love all your children alike. But little Johnny is very ill; he has a fever, and is like to die: now you think more of him than of all the rest. He recovers, and you bring him downstairs in your arms, and just then he is the dearest child of the whole company. Not that he is really more valued than his brothers and sisters, but the fact that he has been so ill, and was likely to die, has brought him more before your mind, and caused you more anxiety, and therefore you have more joy in him because of his recovery. The great deeps of Christ's love are the same to all his flock, but on the surface there is sometimes a holy storm of joy when any one of them has been newly restored after wandering.

Learn the occasion of this demonstrative joy. The wandering one has caused great sorrow. We were all grieved that our brother should become a gross backslider, that such an earnest Christian as he seemed to be should disgrace his profession. Our Lord is still more grieved than we are. When the erring one comes back, we feel a new joy in him. In proportion to the sorrow felt over the wanderer, is the joy manifested when he is restored.

Moreover, great apprehensions were aroused; we feared that he was not the Lord's, and that he would go back unto perdition. We trembled for him. That black dread is all over now: the sheep is safe, the doubtful one is saved and restored to the fold. In proportion to the weight of the apprehension is the intensity of the relief.

The Shepherd had exercised also great labour over the lost one. He went up among the mountains to find his sheep; but now his labour is fully rewarded, for he has found his lost sheep. He remembereth no more his travel and travail for joy that the sheep is safe.

Besides, in this newly-restored one, *there are marks of salvation which cause joy*. He has been torn with the briars, but he is resting now. See how he lies down in the tender grass! He was weary and worn, and almost dead with his wanderings; but now, how happy he is in the presence of his shepherd! How closely he keeps to his shepherd's footsteps! All this goes to make the shepherd glad!

Besides, the shepherd rejoices when he brings back the lost sheep because *he makes that rescue an occasion and opportunity for having a special gala day*. He wishes all his sheep to learn his delight in them all by seeing his delight in one. I know it is so in the church. I bless the Lord when he keeps the feet of his saints: I bless him every day for preserving grace; but when some grievous wanderer is restored, then we bless him more emphatically. Then we have music and dancing. The elder brother wonders what these overflowing joys can mean: but everybody else can see good reason for special mirth when the lost one is found. Shepherds and their flocks cannot have holiday

every day; but when a lost one has been recovered, they feel such mutual delight in each other, and such a common delight in the saving of the lost, that they seize upon the occasion for rejoicing. I want you all to recognize that, if you love the church of Christ, you are bound to keep a feast-day when fallen ones are raised up; and that you may hold that festival, you are bound to put out all your strength to bring in the lost one.

IV. Now we come to the tug-of-war, that is, to look upon our divine Shepherd as HE SETS US A STRIKING EXAMPLE.

We may view this text as *our personal missionary warrant.* To-day we are called upon to think of missions; and as I think it idle to preach about missions in the big high-flying style, I have purposed to say something common-place, but practical. Brethren, we are all of us to be missionaries for Christ, and the text presents a warrant for each one to work earnestly as a soul-winner.

What shall we do, then, to imitate our Lord? The answer is—Let us *go after one* soul. I cannot make a selection for you this morning, but I do entreat all who are workers together with God to go after the ones. There is a kind of knack in speaking to individuals —everybody does not possess it; but every believer should labour to acquire it. Seek the souls of men one by one. It is far easier work to me to speak to you all than it would be to take each one apart and speak to him personally of his soul; and yet such speaking to you one by one might be more successful than this sermon to you in the mass. I entreat you, as the great Shepherd goes after one, do not think you will demean yourself by going after one poor man, or woman, or child; but do it now.

Listen again: *let that one be somebody that is quite out of the way.* Try and think of one who has grievously gone astray; it may be there is one such in your family, or you meet with one such in the course of trade. Think carefully of that one soul, and reflect upon its sin and danger. You would like to pick out a hopeful case, in order that you might feel sure of success. Take another course this time: seek the one which is going astray, and seems hopeless. Follow your Lord's example, and go after one who is the least likely to be found. Will you try this plan? If you do not, you will be quitting the way of your Lord.

"I have a class and a work," says one. Yes, I want you, for a little, to *leave the ninety and nine.* I pray that you may feel called to look after some one greatly depraved person, or some utterly neglected child. Keep up your ninety-and-nine class, if you possibly can, but, at all hazards, go after the one. Make an unusual effort; go out of your way; let ordinary service be placed second for the time being. It will be a healthy change for you, and, perhaps, a great relief. Peradventure, you will come back and do more good with the ninety and nine, after you have been away a little while with the straying one. You are getting a little mouldy; and you are just a wee tired of the monotony of your work. Every Sunday the same girls, or the same boys, and the same form of lesson. Well, cut the whole concern for a little, and go after the one sheep that has gone astray. "You are giving us odd advice, Mr. Spurgeon." If it is not in my

text, then do not follow it; but if it is in our dear Master's words, I trust you will carry it out bravely.

When you go after that one, *have all your wits about you.* Go and *seek;* and that you cannot do, unless you are on the alert. Follow up the straying one. Did you say that you would wait till he called at your house? Is that your notion of seeking lost sheep? Is that the way of sportsmen in the autumn? do they sit in the drawing-room till the pheasants fly by the window? That would be poor sport.

> "O come, let us go and find them,
> In the paths of death they roam."

Go after them, for so the shepherd did. He braved the mountain's slippery side. I do not suppose the shepherd had any greater love for mountain tracks than you have; but up the rough tracks he climbed, for the sheep's sake. Go after sinners into their poverty and wretchedness, until you find them.

Here is one thing to cheer you. If you should win such a soul as that, *you will have more joy, a great deal, than in saving those for whom you regularly labour*—more joy over that lost one than over the ninety and nine hopeful ones. It will be such a support to your faith, such a fillip for your joy, such a bright light to your labour, to have won such a specially guilty one. I should not wonder but what you will talk about it for many a day, and it will be a source of strength to you when things are not quite as you would desire. Such converts are our crown of rejoicing. May I specially recommend that you make a trial of this extra sheep-seeking? If you do not succeed, you will have done no harm; for you will have copied your Lord and Master. But you will succeed, for he is with you, and his Spirit works by you.

I would remind you that, *even under the old law, you would be bound to do this thing.* Turn to the twenty-third chapter of Exodus, and read the fourth and fifth verses. "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him." You are bound to do good even to your enemy. Will you not serve your best friend? If your enemy's ox or ass needed to be taken back to him, you are bound to do it. How much more when the sheep belongs to him whom you love with all your heart! Prove your love to Jesus by labouring to take him back his strays!

Turn to the twenty-second of Deuteronomy, first to fourth verses, and there you will find another bit of the law. "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother." Oh, will you not bring in the stray sheep of your greater Brother, "the first-born among many brethren"? "And if thy brother be not nigh unto thee, or if thou know him not, then thou shalt bring it unto thine own house, and it shall be with thee until thy brother seek after it, and thou shalt restore it to him again." If you cannot get a soul to Christ, at any rate get it to yourself. If you cannot lead it immediately to conversion, show it some hospitality within your own doors, by ministering such comfort as you can. Do what you can to cheer the poor heart

till Christ comes after it. "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again." How easy it is to *hide ourselves!* that is the expression used by Moses, "thou shalt not hide thyself from them." When you know that people are very wicked, the usual plan is to wish them well, but keep out of their way. Prudence makes you hide yourself from them. The whole street may swarm with harlots, but then you have gone to bed, and the door is shut. What has their sin to do with you? There are many drunken men about; but you do not drink to excess, what has their drinking to do with you? That is what is meant by hiding ourselves from them. How easily that can be done! Take an illustration which is worth the telling. A vessel, the other day, was crossing the Atlantic, and it fell in with that disabled emigrant ship, *The Danmark*. Suppose the captain had kept on his course. He might have looked another way, and resolved not to be detained. He might have argued, "I am bound to do the best for my owners. It will hinder me greatly if I go pottering about after this vessel. I had better go by, and not see it; or make haste to port and send out help." It could have been done, and nobody would have been the wiser; for the ship would have gone down soon. The captain of that vessel was a man of a nobler breed. He did not hide himself, nor turn the blind eye towards the vessel in distress. But what did the captain do? All honour to him, he came near, and took the ship in tow. This was not all: he found that she could not keep afloat, and he resolved to take those hundreds of emigrants on board his own ship. But he could not carry them and his cargo too. What then? The decision was greatly to his honour. Overboard goes the cargo! God's blessing rest on the man! Into the sea went the freight, and the passengers were taken on board, and carried to the nearest port. He could have easily hidden himself, could he not? So can you, you Christian people, as you call yourselves. Can you go through this world and always have a blind eye to the case of lost sinners? Can you come in and out of this Tabernacle and never speak to the strangers who throng these aisles? Will you let them go to hell unwarned and uninstructed? Can you hide yourselves from them! How dare you call yourselves Christians? How will you answer for it at last? Brothers, sisters, let us shake off this inhuman indifference, and, deny ourselves rest, ease, credit, that we may save poor sinking souls. Overboard with cargo cheerfully, that you may, in the power of the Holy Ghost, save souls from death.

Once more, this text is *the great missionary warrant for all the church of God*. We are to go, as the Saviour did, to seek and to save that which was lost; and we are to do this, not on account of the numbers of the heathen, but for one of them. I grant you there is a great power in the argument of numbers—so many hundreds of millions in China, so many hundreds of millions in India; but if there were only one person left unsaved in any part of the world, it would be worth while for the entire Christian church to go after that one person; for he who is greater than the church, as the Bridegroom is greater than the bride, quitted heaven, ay, and quitted the sweet society of his own beloved, that he might go after the one that had gone astray. Do not

care, therefore, about numbers: save the smallest tribes. Have an eye to the hamlets in England. I believe that the scattered cottages of our land are in a worse condition than the villages. Care for the ones. Your Lord did so, and here is your warrant for doing the like.

Next, notice, that we ought never to be moved by the supposed superiority of a race. I have heard it said that it would be far better to try and convert the superior races than to consider the more degraded. Is it not better to bring in the educated Brahmins than the wild hill-tribes? "What a fine sort of people these are, these philosophical Hindoos! If we could win them they would be worth converting!" That is not at all according to the mind of Christ. The Shepherd sought a lost sheep, and when he had found it, it was no great spoil for him, for it was so worn out as to be nothing but a destroyed sheep. Yet he went after that one poor animal. Let us feel that the degraded Africans, the dwarfs of the woods, the cannibals of New Guinea, and all such, are to be sought quite as much as more advanced races. They are men; that is enough.

Once more, the motive for missionary enterprise must never be the excellence of the character of the individuals. The shepherd did not go after the sheep, because it never went astray, nor because it was docile, but because it did go astray, and was not docile. The sin of men is their claim upon the church of God. The more sin, the more reason for abounding grace. Oh that the church would feel it to be her duty, if not to go to the most degraded first, yet not to leave them to the last! Where you seem least likely to succeed there go at once, for there you will find room for faith; and where there is room for faith, and faith fills the room, God will send a blessing.

Dear friends, as you cannot, all of you, go abroad to the heathen, though some of you ought to do so, I ask you to do what you can do. Contribute to the collection, which is for the support of mission work. Here is a small opportunity; and if you do not avail yourselves of it, you are not likely to do the greater thing to which I have invited you. The Lord bless you! Amen.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."—Luke xv. 4—7.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ while he was here below was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. He took pains to put himself where he could come into communication with them, and he exhibited such kindliness towards them that in crowds they drew near to hear him. I dare say it was a queer-looking assembly, a disreputable rabble, which made the Lord Jesus its centre. I am not astonished that the Pharisee, when he looked upon the congregation, sneered and said, "He collects around him the pariahs of our community, the wretches who collect taxes for the foreigner of God's free people; and the fallen women of the towns, and such-like riffraff make up his audiences; and he, instead of repelling them, receives them, welcomes them, looks upon them as a class to whom he has a peculiar relationship. He even eats with them. Did he not go into the house of Zaccheus, and the house of Levi, and partake of the feasts which these low people made for him?" We cannot tell you all the Pharisees thought, it might not be edifying to attempt it; but they thought as badly of the Lord as they possibly could, because of the company which surrounded him. And so, he deigns in this parable to defend himself; not that he cared much about what they might think, but that they might have no excuse for speaking so bitterly of him. He tells them that he was seeking the lost, and where should he be found but among those whom he was seeking? Should a physician shun the sick? Should a shepherd avoid the lost sheep? Was he not exactly in his right position when there "drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him"?

Our divine Lord defended himself by what is called an *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument to the men themselves; for he said, "What man *of you*, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not go after that which is lost, until he find it?" No argument tells more powerfully upon men than one which comes close home to their own daily life, and the Saviour put it so. They were silenced, if they were not convinced. It was a peculiarly strong argument, because in their case it was only a sheep that they would go after, but in his case it was something infinitely more precious than all the flocks of sheep that ever fed on Sharon or Carmel; for it was the soul of man which he sought to save. The argument had in it not only the point of peculiar adaptation, but a force at the back of it unusually powerful for driving it home upon every honest mind. It may be opened out in this fashion,—"If you men would each one of you go after a lost sheep, and follow in its track until you found it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them in all their wanderings until I can rescue them?" The going after the sheep is a part of the parable which our Lord meant them to observe: the shepherd pursues a route which he would never think of pursuing if it were only for his own pleasure; his way is not selected for his own ends, but for the sake of the stray sheep. He takes a track up hill and down dale, far into a desert, or into some dark wood, simply because the sheep has gone that way, and he must follow it until he find it. Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a matter of taste and pleasure, would never have been found among the publicans and sinners, nor among any of our guilty race: if he had consulted his own ease and comfort he would have consorted only with pure and holy angels, and the great Father above; but he was not thinking of himself, his heart was set upon the lost ones, and therefore he went where the lost sheep were; "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The more steadily you look at this parable the more clearly you will see that our Lord's answer was complete. We need not this morning regard it exclusively as an answer to Pharisees, but we may look at it as an instruction to ourselves; for it is quite as complete in that direction. May the good Spirit instruct us as we muse upon it.

I. In the first place, I call attention to this observation: THE ONE SUBJECT OF THOUGHT to the man who had lost his sheep. This sets forth to us the one thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, when he sees a man lost to holiness and happiness by wandering into sin.

The shepherd, on looking over his little flock of one hundred, can only count ninety-nine. He counts them again, and he notices that a certain one has gone: it may be a white-faced sheep with a black mark on its foot: he knows all about it, for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." The shepherd has a photograph of the wanderer in his mind's eye, and now he thinks but little of the ninety and nine who are feeding in the pastures of the wilderness, but his mind is in a ferment about the one lost sheep. This one idea possesses him: "a sheep is lost!" This agitates his mind more and more—"a sheep is lost." It masters his every faculty. He cannot eat bread; he cannot return to his home; he cannot rest while one sheep is lost.

To a tender heart a lost sheep is a painful subject of thought. It is

a sheep, and therefore utterly *defenceless* now that it has left its defender. If the wolf should spy it out, or the lion or the bear should come across its track, it would be torn in pieces in an instant. Thus the shepherd asks his heart the question—"What will become of my sheep? Perhaps at this very moment a lion may be ready to spring upon it, and, if so, it cannot help itself!" A sheep is not prepared for fight, and even for flight it has not the swiftness of its enemy. That makes its compassionate owner the more sad as he thinks again—"A sheep is lost, it is in great danger of a cruel death." A sheep is of all creatures the most *senseless*. If we have lost a dog, it may find its way home again; possibly a horse might return to its master's stable; but a sheep will wander on and on, in endless mazes lost. It is too foolish a thing to think of returning to the place of safety. A lost sheep is lost indeed in countries where lands lie unenclosed and the plains are boundless. That fact still seems to ring in the man's soul—"A sheep is lost, and it will not return, for it is a foolish thing. Where may it not have gone by this time? Weary and worn, it may be fainting; it may be far away from green pastures, and be ready to perish with hunger among the bare rocks or upon the arid sand." A sheep is *shiftless;* it knows nothing about providing for itself. The camel can scent water from afar, and a vulture can espy its food from an enormous distance; but the sheep can find nothing for itself. Of all wretched creatures a lost sheep is one of the worst. If anybody had stepped up to the shepherd just then, and said, "Good sir, what aileth you? you seem in great concern"; he would have replied, "And well I may be, for a sheep is lost." "It is only one, sir; and I see you have ninety-nine left." "Do you call it nothing to lose one? You are no shepherd yourself, or you would not trifle so. Why, I seem to forget these ninety-nine that are all safe, and my mind only remembers that one which is lost."

What is it which makes the Great Shepherd lay so much to his heart the loss of one of his flock? What is it that makes him agitated as he reflects upon that supposition—"if he lose one of them"?

I think it is, first, because of *his property in it.* The parable does not so much speak of a hired shepherd, but of a shepherd proprietor. "What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them." Jesus, in another place, speaks of the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, and therefore he flees when the wolf comes. It is the shepherd proprietor who lays down his life for the sheep. It is not a sheep alone, and a lost sheep, but it is one of his own lost sheep that this man cares for. This parable is not written about lost humanity in the bulk—it may be so used if you please—but in its first sense it is written about Christ's own sheep; as also is the second parable concerning the woman's own money; and the third, not concerning any prodigal youth, but the father's own son. Jesus has his own sheep, and some of them are lost: yea, they were all once in the same condition; for "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." The parable refers to the unconverted, whom Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood, and whom he has undertaken to seek and to save: these are those other sheep whom also he must bring in. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them

out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." The sheep of Christ are his long before they know it—his even when they wander; and when they are brought into the fold by the effectual working of his grace they become manifestly what they were in covenant from of old. The sheep are Christ's, first, because he chose them from before the foundations of the world—"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." His, next, because the Father gave them to him. How he dwells upon that fact in his great prayer in John xvii.: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me;" "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." We are the Lord's own flock, furthermore, by his purchase of us; he says: "I lay down my life for the sheep." It is nearly nineteen centuries ago since he paid the ransom price, and bought us to be his own; and we shall be his, for that purchase-money was not paid in vain. And so the Saviour looks upon his hands, and sees the marks of his purchase; he looks upon his side, and sees the token of the effectual redemption of his own elect unto himself by the pouring out of his own heart's blood before the living God. This thought, therefore, presses upon him, "One of my sheep is lost." It is a wonderful supposition, that which is contained in this parable—"if he lose one of them." What! lose one whom he loved or ever the earth was? It may wander for a time, but he will not have it lost for ever: that he cannot bear. What! lose one whom his Father gave him to be his own? Lose one whom he has bought with his own life? He will not endure the thought. That word—"if he lose one of them" sets his soul on fire. It shall not be. You know how much the Lord has valued each one of his chosen, laying down his life for his redemption. You know how dearly he loves every one of his people: it is no new passion with him, neither can it grow old. He has loved his own and must love them to the end. From eternity that love has endured already, and it must continue throughout the ages, for he changeth not. Will he lose one of those so dearly loved? Never; never. He has eternal possession of them by a covenant of salt, wherein the Father hath given them to him: this it is which in great measure stirs his soul so that he thinks of nothing but this fact,—One of my sheep is lost.

Secondly, he has yet another reason for this all-absorbing thought, namely, *his great compassion* for his lost sheep. The wandering of a soul causes Jesus deep sorrow; he cannot bear the thought of its perishing. Such is the love and tenderness of his heart that he cannot bear that one of his own should be in jeopardy. He can take no rest as long as a soul for whom he shed his blood still abides under the dominion of Satan and under the power of sin; therefore the Great Shepherd neither night nor day forgetteth his sheep: he must save his flock, and he is straitened till it be accomplished.

He has a deep sympathy with each stray heart. He knows the sorrow that sin brings, the deep pollution and the terrible wounding that comes of transgression, even at the time; and the sore heart and the broken spirit that will come of it before long; and so the sympathetic Saviour grieves over each lost sheep, for he knows the

misery which lies in the fact of being lost. If you have ever been in a house with a mother and father, and daughters and sons, when a little child has been lost, you will never forget the agitation of each member of the household. See the father as he goes to the police-station, and calls at every likely house; for he must find his child or break his heart. See the deep oppression and bitter anguish of the mother; she is like one distracted till she has news of her darling. You now begin to understand what Jesus feels for one whom he loves, who is graven on the palms of his hands, whom he looked upon in the glass of his foreknowledge, when he was bleeding his life away upon the tree; he hath no rest in his spirit till his beloved is found. He hath compassion like a God, and that doth transcend all the compassion of parents or of brothers,—the compassion of an infinite heart brimming over with an ocean of love. This one thought moves the pity of the Lord—"if he lose one of them."

Moreover, the man in the parable had a third relation to the sheep, which made him possessed with the one thought of its being lost,—*he was a shepherd to it.* It was his own sheep, and he had therefore for that very reason become its shepherd; and he says to himself, "If I lose one of them my shepherd-work will be ill-done." What dishonour it would be to a shepherd to lose one of his sheep! Either it must be for want of power to keep it, or want of will, or want of watchfulness; but none of these can appertain to the Chief Shepherd. Our Lord Jesus Christ will never have it said of him that he has lost one of his people, for he glories in having preserved them all. "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled." The devil shall never say that Jesus suffered one whom his Father gave him to perish. His work of love cannot in any degree become a failure. His death in vain! No, not in jot or tittle. I can imagine, if it were possible, that the Son of God should live in vain: but to die in vain! It shall never be. The purpose that he meant to achieve by his passion and death he shall achieve, for he is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Omnipotent; and who shall stay his hand, or baffle his design? He will not have it. "If he lose one of them," says the passage; imagine the consequence. What scorn would come from Satan! What derision would he pour upon the Shepherd! How hell would ring with the news, "He hath lost one of them." Suppose it to be the feeblest; then would they cry, "He could keep the strong, who could keep themselves." Suppose it to be the strongest; then would they cry, "He could not even keep one of the mightiest of them, but must needs let him perish." This is good argument, for Moses pleaded with God, "What will the Egyptians say?" It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones shall perish, neither is it for the glory of Christ that one of his own sheep should be eternally lost.

You see the reason for the Lord's heart being filled with one burning thought; for first, the sheep is his own; next, he is full of compassion; and then again, it is his office to shepherd the flock.

All this while the sheep is not thinking about the shepherd, or caring for him in the least degree. Some of you are not thinking at all about

the Lord Jesus. You have no wish nor will to seek after him! What folly! Oh, the pity of it, that the great heart above should be yearning over you to-day, and should fail to rest because you are in peril, and you, who will be the greater loser, for you will lose your own soul, are sporting with sin, and making yourself merry with destruction. Ah, me! how far you have wandered! How hopeless would your case be if there were not an Almighty Shepherd to think upon you.

II. Now we come to the second point, and observe THE ONE OBJECT OF SEARCH. This sheep lies on the shepherd's heart, and he must at once set out to look for it. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and goes after that which is lost until he find it.

Observe here that it is *a definite search.* The shepherd goes after the sheep, and after nothing else; and he has the one particular sheep in his mind's eye. I should have imagined, from the way in which I have seen this text handled, that Christ, the Shepherd, went down into the wilderness to catch anybody's sheep he could find. Many were running about, and he did not own any one of them more than another, but was content to pick up the one that he could first lay hold upon; or rather, that which first came running after him. Not so is the case depicted in the parable. It is his own sheep that he is seeking, and he goes distinctly after that one. It is his sheep which was lost,—a well-known sheep; well known not only to himself, but even to his friends and neighbours,—for he speaks to them as if it was perfectly understood which sheep it was that he went to save. Jesus knows all about his redeemed, and he goes definitely after such and such a soul. When I am preaching in the name of the Lord, I delight to think that I am sent to individuals with the message of mercy. I am not going to draw the bow at a venture at all; but when the Divine hands are put on mine to draw the bow, the Lord takes such aim that no arrow misses its mark: into the very centre of the heart the word finds its way; for Jesus goes not forth at a peradventure in his dealings with men. He subdues the will and conquers the heart, making his people willing in the day of his power. He calls individuals and they come. He saith, "Mary," and the response is, "Rabboni." I say, the man in the parable sought out a distinct individual, and rested not till he found it; and so doth the Lord Jesus in the movements of his love go forth at no uncertainty: he does not grope about to catch whom he may, as if he played at Blindman's-buff with salvation, but he seeks and saves the one out of his own sheep which he has his eye upon in its wanderings. Jesus knows what he means to do, and he will perform it to the glory of the Father.

Note that this is *an all-absorbing search.* He is thinking of nothing but his own lost sheep. The ninety-and-nine are left in safety; but they *are* left. When we read that he leaves them in the wilderness we are apt to think of some barren place; but that is not intended: it simply means the open pasturage, the steppe, the prairie: he leaves them well provided for, leaves them because he can leave them. For the time being he is carried away with the one thought that he must seek and save the lost one, and therefore he leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasture. "Shepherd, the way is very rocky!" He does not seem to know what the way is, his heart is with his lost sheep. "Shepherd,

it is a heavy climb up yon mountain side." He does not note his toil; his excitement lends him the feet of the wild goat; he stands securely where at other times his foot would slip. He looks around for his sheep and seems to see neither crag nor chasm. "Shepherd, it is a terrible path by which you must descend into yonder gloomy valley." It is not terrible to him: his only terror is lest his sheep should perish; he is taken up with that one fear, and nothing else. He leaps into danger, and escapes it by the one strong impulse which bears him on. It is grand to think of the Lord Jesus Christ with his heart set immovably upon the rescue of a soul which at this moment is lost to him.

It is *an active search* too; for observe, he goes after that which is lost, until he find it; and he does this with *a personal search.* He does not say to one of his underlings, "Here, hasten after that sheep which was lost, and bring it home." No, *he* follows it himself. And if ever there is a soul brought from sin to grace, it is not by us poor ministers working alone, but it is by the Master himself, who goes after his own sheep. It is glorious to think of him still personally tracking sinners, who, though they fly from him with a desperateness of folly, yet are still pursued by him—pursued by the Son of God, by the Eternal Lover of men—pursued by him until he finds them.

For notice *the perseverance of the search:* "until he find it." He does not stop till he has done the deed. You and I ought to seek after a soul, how long? Why, until we find it; for such is the model set before us by the Master. The parable says nothing about his not finding it; no hint of failure is given; we dream not that there may be a sheep belonging to him which he will never find. Oh, brethren, there are a great many whom you and I would never find; but when Jesus is after his own lost sheep, depend upon it such is his skill, so clearly doth he see, and so effectually doth he intervene, that he will surely bring them in. A defeated Christ I cannot conceive of. It is a personal search, and a persevering search, and *a successful search,* until he finds it. Let us praise and bless his name for this.

Observe that when the shepherd does find it, there is a little touch in the parable not often noticed,—he does not appear to put it back into the fold again: I mean, we do not find it so written, as a fact to be noted. I suppose he did so place it ultimately; but for the time being he keeps it with himself rather than with its fellows. The next scene is the shepherd at home, saying, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." It looks as if Jesus did not save a soul so much to the church as to himself, and though the saved are in the flock, the greatest joy of all is that the sheep is with the shepherd. This shows you how thoroughly Christ lays himself out that he may save his people. There is nothing in Christ that does not tend towards the salvation of his redeemed. There are no pull-backs with him, no half-consecrated influences which make him linger. In the pursuit of certain objects we lay out a portion of our faculties; but Jesus lays out all his powers upon the seeking and saving of souls.

The whole Christ seeks after each sinner; and when the Lord finds it, he gives himself to that one soul as if he had but that one soul to bless. How my heart admires the concentration of all the Godhead and manhood of Christ in his search after each sheep of his flock.

III. Now, we must pass on very briefly to notice a third point. We have had one subject of thought and one object of search; now we have ONE BURDEN OF LOVE. When the seeking is ended, then the saving appears,—"When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Splendid action this! How beautifully the parable sets forth the whole of salvation. Some of the old writers delight to put it thus: in his incarnation he came after the lost sheep; in his life he continued to seek it; in his death he laid it upon his shoulders; in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension he brought it home rejoicing. Our Lord's career is a course of soul-winning, a life laid out for his people; and in it you may trace the whole process of salvation.

But now, see, the shepherd finds the sheep, and he layeth it on his shoulders. It is *an uplifting action*, raising the fallen one from the earth whereon he hath strayed. It is as though he took the sheep just as it was, without a word of rebuke, without delay or hesitancy, and lifted it out of the slough or the briers into a place of safety. Do you not remember when the Lord lifted you up from the horrible pit? when he sent from above, and delivered you, and became your strength? I shall never forget that day. What a wonderful lift it was for me when the Great Shepherd lifted me into newness of life. The Lord said of Israel, "I bare you on eagles' wings;" but it is a dearer emblem still to be borne upon the shoulders of the incarnate Lord.

This laying on the shoulders was *an appropriating act.* He seemed to say, "You are my sheep, and therefore I lay you on my shoulders." He did not make his claim in so many words, but by a rapid action he declared it: for a man does not bear away a sheep to which he has no right: this was not a sheep-stealer, but a shepherd-proprietor. He holds fast the sheep by all four of its legs, so that it cannot stir, and then he lays it on his own shoulders, for it is all his own now. He seems to say, "I am a long way from home, and I am in a weary desert; but I have found my sheep, and these hands shall hold it." Here are our Lord's own words, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Hands of such might as those of Jesus will hold fast the found one. Shoulders of such power as those of Jesus will safely bear the found one home. It is all well with that sheep, for it is positively and experimentally the Good Shepherd's own, just as it always had been his in the eternal purpose of the Father. Do you remember when Jesus said unto you, "Thou art mine"? Then I know you also appropriated him, and began to sing—

> "So I my best Beloved's am,
> And he is mine."

More condescending still is another view of this act: it was *a deed of service* to the sheep. The sheep is uppermost, the weight of the sheep is upon the shepherd. The sheep rides, the shepherd is the burden-bearer. The sheep rests, the shepherd labours. "I am among you as he that serveth," said our Lord long ago. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." On that cross he bore the burden of our sin, and what is more, the burden of our very selves. Blessed be his name, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," and he hath

laid us on him, too, and he beareth us. Remember that choice Scripture: "In his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." Soul-melting thought, the Son of God became subservient to the sons of man! The Maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.

It was a *rest-giving* act, very likely *needful* to the sheep which could go no further, and was faint and weary. It was a full rest to the poor creature if it could have understood it, to feel itself upon its shepherd's shoulders, irresistibly carried back to safety. What a rest it is to you and to me to know that we are borne along by the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ! "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him, and he shall dwell between his shoulders." The Christ upbears us to-day: we have no need of strength: our weakness is no impediment, for he bears us. Hath not the Lord said, "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry and will deliver you"? We shall not even stumble, much less fall to ruin: the shepherd's feet shall traverse all the road in safety. No portion of the way back should cause us fear, for he is able to bear us even to his home above. What a sweet word is that in Deuteronomy: "The Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place." Blessed rest of faith, to give yourself up entirely to those hands and shoulders to keep and carry you even to the end! Let us bless and praise the Lord. The shepherd is consecrated to his burden: he bears nothing on his shoulders but his sheep; and the Lord Jesus seemeth to bear no burden but that of his people. He layeth out his omnipotence to save his chosen; having redeemed them first with price of blood, he redeems them still with all his power. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." Oh the glorious grace of our unfailing Saviour, who consecrates himself to our salvation, and concentrates upon that object all that he has and is!

IV. We close by noticing one more matter, which is—THE ONE SOURCE OF JOY. This man who had lost his sheep is filled with joy, but his sheep is the sole source of it. His sheep has so taken up all his thought, and so commanded all his faculties, that as he found all his care centred upon it, so he now finds all his joy flowing from it.

I invite you to notice the first mention of joy we get here: "When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." "That is a great load for you, shepherd!" Joyfully he answers, "I am glad to have it on my shoulders." The mother does not say when she has found her lost child, "This is a heavy load." No; she presses it to her bosom. She does not mind how heavy it is; it is a dear burden to her. She is rejoiced to bear it once again. "He layeth it on his shoulders, *rejoicing*." Remember that text: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." A great sorrow was on Christ when our load was laid on him; but a greater joy flashed into his mind when he thought that we were thus recovered from our lost estate. He said to himself, "I have taken them up upon my shoulders, and none can hurt them now, neither can they wander to destruction. I am bearing their sin, and they shall never come into condemnation. The penalty of their guilt has been laid

on me that it may never be laid on them. I am an effectual and efficient Substitute for them. I am bearing, that they may never bear, my Father's righteous ire." His love to them made it a joy to feel every lash of the scourge of justice; his love to them made it a delight that the nails should pierce his hands and feet, and that his heart should be broken with the absence of his Father, God. Even "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," when the deeps of its woe have been sounded, will be found to have pearls of joy in its caverns. No shout of triumph can equal that cry of grief, because our Lord joyed to bear even the forsaking of his Father for the sin of his chosen whom he had loved from before the foundation of the world. Oh, you cannot understand it except in a very feeble measure! Let us try to find an earthly miniature likeness. A son is taken ill far away from home. He is laid sick with a fever, and a telegram is sent home. His mother says she *must* go and nurse him; she is wretched till she can set out upon the journey. It is a dreary place where her boy lies, but for the moment it is the dearest spot on earth to her. She joys to leave the comforts of her home to tarry among strangers for the love of her boy. She feels an intense joy in sacrificing herself; she refuses to retire from the bedside, she will not leave her charge; she watches day and night, and only from utter exhaustion does she fall asleep. You could not have kept her in England, she would have been too wretched. It was a great, deep, solemn pleasure for her to be where she could minister to her own beloved. Soul, remember you have given Jesus great joy in his saving you. He was for ever with the Father, eternally happy, infinitely glorious, as God over all; but yet he must needs come hither out of boundless love, take upon himself our nature, and suffer in our stead to bring us back to holiness and God. "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." That day the shepherd knew but one joy. He had found his sheep, and the very pressure of it upon his shoulders made his heart light, for he knew by that sign that the object of his care was safe beyond all question.

Now he goes home with it, and this joy of his was then so great that it filled his soul to overflowing. The parable speaks nothing as to his joy in getting home again, nor a word concerning the joy of being saluted by his friends and neighbours. No, the joy of having found his sheep eclipsed all other gladness of heart, and dimmed the light of home and friendship. He turns round to friends and neighbours and entreats them to help him to bear the weight of his happiness. He cries, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." One sinner had repented, and all heaven must make holiday concerning it. Oh, brethren, there is enough joy in the heart of Christ over his saved ones to flood all heaven with delight. The streets of Paradise run knee-deep with the heavenly waters of the Saviour's joy. They flow out of the very soul of Christ, and angels and glorified spirits bathe in the mighty stream. Let us do the same. We are friends if we are not neighbours. He calls us to-day to come and bring our hearts, like empty vessels, that he may fill them with his own joy, that our joy may be full. Those of us who are saved must enter into the joy of our Lord. When I was trying to think over this text I rejoiced with my Lord in the bringing in of each one of his sheep, for each one makes a heaven full of

joy. But, oh to see all the redeemed brought in! Jesus would have no joy if he should lose one: it would seem to spoil it all. If the purpose of mercy were frustrated in any one instance it were a dreary defeat of the great Saviour. But his purpose shall be carried out in every instance. He "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." He shall not fail nor be discouraged. He shall carry out the will of the Father. He shall have the full reward of his passion. Let us joy and rejoice with him this morning!

But the text tells us there was more joy over that one lost sheep than over the ninety-and-nine that went not astray. Who are these just persons that need no repentance? Well, you should never explain a parable so as to make it run on four legs if it was only meant to go on two. There may not be such persons at all, and yet the parable may be strictly accurate. If all of us had been such persons, and had never needed repentance, we should not have given as much joy to the heart of Christ as one sinner does when he repents. But suppose it to mean you and me who have long ago repented—who have, in a certain sense, now no need of repentance, because we are justified men and women—we do not give so much joy to the heart of God, for the time being, as a sinner does when he first returns unto God. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray, or a bad thing to be kept from it. You understand how that is: there are seven children in a family, and six of them are all well; but one dear child is taken seriously ill, and is brought near to the gates of death. It has recovered, its life is spared, and do you wonder that for the time being it gives more joy to the household than all the healthy ones? There is more expressed delight about it a great deal than over all those that have not been ill at all. This does not show it is a good thing to be ill. No, nothing of the kind; we are only speaking of *the joy* which comes of recovery from sickness. Take another case: you have a son who has been long away in a far country, and another son at home. You love them both equally, but when the absent son comes home he is for a season most upon your thoughts. Is it not natural that it should be so? Those at home give us joy constantly from day to day, but when the stream of joy has been dammed back by his absence, it pours down in a flood upon his return. Then we have "high days and holy days" and "bonfire nights."

There are special circumstances about repentance and conversion which produce joy over a restored wanderer. There was a preceding sorrow, and this sets off the joy by contrast. The shepherd was so touched with compassion for the lost sheep, that now his sorrow is inevitably turned into joy. He suffered a dreadful suspense, and that is a killing thing; it is like an acid eating into the soul. That suspense which makes one ask, Where is the sheep? Where can it be? is a piercing of the heart. All those weary hours of searching, and seeking, and following are painfully wearing to the heart. You feel as if you would almost sooner know that you never would find it than be in that doubtful state of mind. That suspense when it is ended naturally brings with it a sweet liberty of joy. Moreover, you know that the joy over penitents is so unselfish that you who have been kept by the grace of God for many years do not grieve that there should be more joy over a repenting sinner than over you. No, you say to yourself, "There

is good cause. I am myself among those who are glad." You remember that good men made great rejoicing over you when you first came to Jesus; and you heartily unite with them in welcoming newcomers. You will not act the elder brother, and say I will not share the joy of my Father. Not a bit of it; but you will enter heartily into the music and dancing, and count it your heaven to see souls saved from hell. I feel a sudden flush and flood of delight when I meet with a poor creature who once lay at hell's dark door, but is now brought to the gate of heaven. Do not you?

The one thing I want to leave with you is how our gracious Lord seems to give himself up to his own redeemed. How entirely and perfectly every thought of his heart, every action of his power, goes toward the needy, guilty, lost soul. He spends his all to bring back his banished. Poor souls who believe in him have his whole strength engaged on their behalf. Blessed be his name! Now let all our hearts go forth in love towards him, who gave all his heart to work our redemption. Let us love him. We cannot love him as he loved us as to measure; but let us do so in like manner. Let us love him with all our heart and soul. Let us feel as if we saw nothing, knew nothing, loved nothing save Jesus crucified. As we filled all *his* heart let him fill all our hearts!

Oh, poor sinner, here to-day, will you not yield to the Good Shepherd? Will you not stand still as he draws near? Will you not submit to his mighty grace? Know that your rescue from sin and death must be of him, and of him alone. Breathe a prayer to him,—"Come, Lord, I wait for thy salvation! Save me, for I trust in thee." If thou dost thus pray, thou hast the mark upon thee of Christ's sheep, for he saith, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Come to him, for he comes to you. Look to him for he looks to you.

Our Great Shepherd
Finding the Sheep

"Until he find it. . . . And when he hath found it. . . . And when he cometh home"—Luke xv. 4, 5, 6.

THE love of Jesus, the Great Shepherd, is very *practical* and active. There is a sheep lost, and the Lord regrets it; but his love does not spend itself in regrets; he arises, and goes forth to seek and to save that which was lost. The love of Jesus Christ is love not in word only, but in deed and in truth. The love of Jesus is *prevenient*. He does not wait until the sheep is willing to return, or until it makes some attempt to come back; but no sooner is its lost estate known to the Shepherd than he starts off, that he may find that which was lost. The love of Jesus to the lost sheep is *pre-eminent*. He leaves the ninety-and-nine in their pasturage; and for a while forgets them, that all his heart, his eye, his strength may be given to the one that has gone astray. O sweet love of Christ, so practical, so pre-eminent, so prevenient! Let us ask for grace that we may imitate it, especially those of us who are called to be shepherds of men.

Among God's people most of the saints have a charge to watch over. However little the flock may be, even if it be restricted to our own family, or to the little class that gathers about us on the Sabbath, yet we are all our brother's keeper in some measure. Let us learn the love of Christ, that we may be wise in shepherdry. Let us not talk about our friends, and say we love them; but let us show it by earnest, personal, speedy endeavours to do them good. Let us not wait until we see some goodness in them—until they seek after instruction. But

> "Oh, come, let us go and find them,
> In the paths of death they roam."

And long before they have a thought of coming home, let us be on their track, eager to grasp them, if by any means we may save some. Oh, to have in our hearts such love of souls that it engrosses us so that we forget earthly needs, and only remember this yet higher

necessity! It is a good house, said St. Bernard, in which Martha has to complain of Mary—where gracious pursuits put other work in the background. It is a choice crime that men should even grow lax about their lower business for a while, that they may devote their chief energy to the saving of the lost sheep.

Let that stand as an introduction. May we see the love of Jesus, as Bernard saw it, and we shall have had sermon enough.

In my text there are three periods to which I call your attention.

I. Christ, the Good Shepherd, first seeks the lost sheep "UNTIL HE FIND IT." Just put a mark under those words. That is our first head—"Until he find it." It is a long reach "Until he find it."

I like the expression. The Lord Jesus did not come down to earth to make an attempt to find men, but he came to do it, and he did it. He tarried here, seeking the lost sheep till he found it: he never gave over till his work was done. At this hour, in his work of grace amongst his chosen, he does not make an attempt at their salvation, and suffer defeat; but he keeps at soul-seeking work until he find it.

Look at the seeking shepherd: he is looking for the sheep. Notice his anxious countenance "until he find it." We read that after he found it he rejoiced; but there is no rejoicing until he find it. He is all excitement, quick of ear to catch the faintest sound, for it may be the bleating of his lost sheep. His eyes are like the eyes of eagles. He saw something stir in the bracken yonder, and he will be there in a bound or two; he is so eager. No: it was a mistake. It was not the sheep; perhaps it was some frightened fox. He climbs a cairn, and from the top of it he looks all around. I was about to say that he looks with ears and eyes together. He puts his whole soul into the organs of watchfulness, if peradventure he may discern the sheep. Is there a smile on his face? Ah, no! not "until he find it." His whole soul is in his eyes and ears until he find it. This is a faint yet true picture of that Great Shepherd who came here to seek his flock. So the evangelists have drawn him in their pen-and-ink sketches of him—always watchful; spending night and day, in prayers, and tears, and entreaties; never more to have a joy until he find the lost one. Then, when he did find a single sheep, finding his meat and his drink in it, and becoming refreshed from the fact that he has so far accomplished his beloved work. The great Shepherd is all energy, care, and concentration of thought concerning his sheep, "until he find it."

There is no hesitating with Jesus. The sheep is lost, and the news is brought to the shepherd; he girds his loose robe about him, and is on the way. He knows within a little which way that stray sheep will go, and he is on its track at once, though he knows that he must mark that track with his blood. See the blessed shepherd pressing on: there is no pausing nor resting "until he find it." He has made up his mind that no sheep of his shall be lost, and he hies over hill and dale after the wanderer until he find it.

If you look into that shepherd's face, there is no trace of anger there. He does not say, "Oh, that I should be worried with this silly sheep thus going astray!" No thought is there but that of anxious love. It is all love, and nothing else but love, before he finds and until he finds it; and you may be sure that careful tenderness will

be in full action after he has found it. He is looking with anxious eye of love. "As I live," saith the Lord, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he should turn unto me and live." "Until he find it" there will be no thought of anxiety, but a fulness of pitying care for the lost sheep.

And, mark, there is no giving up. That sheep has wandered now for many hours. The sun has risen, and the sun has set; or, at least it is just going down; but as long as the shepherd can see, and the sheep is still alive, he will pursue it "until he find it." He has been disappointed a great many times; and when he thought that he should have found it, he has missed it; but still, he will never give it up. He is impelled onward by irresistible love, and he must continue his weary search until he find it. It was precisely so with our Lord Jesus Christ. When he came after you and after me, we ran from him, but he pursued us: we hid from him, but he discovered us: he had almost grasped us, but so long as we eluded him he still pursued with love unwearied until he found us. Oh, if he had given up after the first ten years—if he had ceased to care for some of us after fifty different occasions in which we had choked conscience and quenched the Spirit, then we should have been lost. But he would not be turned away. If he determines to save, he continues to pursue the rambling sheep until he find it. He cannot, he must not, he will not, cease from the work of seeking and of finding till he find it. I wish to-night that the time were come with some here that it should be said, "The Saviour did pursue such and such a one until he found him—found him in the Tabernacle, and ended all his wanderings there—found him standing in yonder gallery, and ended all his wanderings at the 'foot of the cross.'" God grant that it may be so! but whether it be so with you or not, be ye sure of this—that the Lord Jesus has in hundreds and thousands of cases pursued sinners with unflagging mercy, leaping to them over hills of sin, and following them till he has found them. We are now his for ever and ever, for he who has found us will never lose us. Blessed be his name!

Learn this lesson before I pass on. If ever you are seeking the conversion of any man follow him up until you find him. Do not be discouraged. Put up with a great many rebuffs and rebukes: you will have him yet. He is surest to succeed who cannot be put off from his aim. From some it will be necessary to receive a great deal that is most discouraging. Receive it, and say nothing about it; only whisper to yourself, "I might well have put the Great Shepherd off from caring for me, and yet was not so turned aside. If he persevered with me even to the death, I may well persevere as long as I live in seeking and finding a soul. I have heard of wives who have pleaded with God for their husbands twenty years; and yet have seen them converted after all. There are instances in this place in which indefatigable love has followed up ungodly relatives until they have at last been saved by sovereign grace. Persevere with loving entreaties! Till you bury your unsaved ones, do not consider them dead; and do not bury them spiritually till they are dead really. Some are easily baffled. They

have written the death-warrant of their friend by ceasing to pray for him, and yet that death-warrant will never be written in the records of heaven, for their friend will be brought to the Saviour's feet.

"Until he find it." Now nail your colours to the mast. "Until he find it." Go out, ye under-shepherds for Christ. Wear this motto on your right hand. "Until I find it." Live or die, or work or suffer, whether the time be short or long, or the way be smooth or rough, let each one of you be bound to seek a soul "until he find it." You will find it then, even as Christ found you. There I leave that first point.

II. And now we come to the second—"AND WHEN HE HATH FOUND IT." When he has found it, what does he do then? Well, first, *he takes fast hold.* "He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing." So when he has found it, the first thing is to get a tight grip of it. See him: he has got close up to the sheep. The poor thing is spent, and yet may have strength enough to get away, therefore the shepherd takes good care that he shall not. He grasps his legs and holds him tight. That is what the Lord Jesus does when at last he gets a man broken down under a sense of sin, spent and worn out as to further resistance of divine mercy. Our Lord gets such a grip of the rebel that he will never get away any more. I remember when he laid hold of me. He has never lost his grasp even to this day. But, oh, it was a grasp! Nothing ever gripped my fickle mind like the hand of Christ. When the divine hand, which fixed the foundations of the earth, had fixed itself on me, my wanderings were ended once for all.

The next thing after the fast hold was *the gracious lift.* He lifted this poor sheep up and put it on his shoulders, and there it was with all its weight, carried by powerful shoulders. That is what the Saviour does for poor weary sinners. He carries the weight of their sin, nay the weight of themselves. He takes us just as we are, and instead of driving us back by his law, he carries us home by his love. Instead of urging us to go home, he becomes the great burden-bearer of his redeemed, and bears them on his shoulders. And now you have before you one of the loveliest of portraits that ever imagination can sketch—that great crowned Shepherd of the sheep, King of kings and Lord of lords, bearing on his shoulders, as a burden he delights to carry, the sheep that had gone astray. Oh, I pray God that you may lie on those broad shoulders if you never have been so favoured. The shoulders of omnipotence bearing up our weakness—the mighty Saviour bearing us and all our sin and all our care, and our whole being upon the shoulders of his strength—this is a sight for angels.

And as he thus carries the weight, observe that *the distance is removed.* We read in the next verse, "When he cometh home," but there is nothing said about the road; for somehow our Master has the knack of being at home at once. The sinner may weary himself by twenty years of sin, but in five minutes that may all be gone. It may have taken you fifty years to make yourself such a hell-deserving sinner as you are, but it will not take Jesus fifty ticks of the clock to wash you and make you whiter than snow, and to get you back into the great Father's house. Truth to tell, the Shepherd's redeeming work is done already.

"How dreadful was the hour,
When God our wanderings laid,
And did at once his vengeance pour
Upon our Shepherd's head!

"How glorious was the grace,
When Christ sustained the stroke!
His life and blood the Shepherd pays,
A ransom for the flock."

By that redeeming process he brought us near to God.

There is no weary journey back for Shepherd or sheep. He grasps the sheep; he puts it on his shoulders, and they are both back at the fold.

But the particular point I want you to notice is when the great Shepherd gets this burden on his back. We read, "When he hath found it he layeth it upon his shoulders"—with great anxiety? Look to see whether it is so. Nothing of the sort. But is it not, "He layeth it on his shoulders with great weariness"? No. See! See! "He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing—*rejoicing*." He does not remember all the weariness that he has had to suffer. He does not think of the folly of his sheep in having lost good pasture, in having involved itself in so much danger, and in costing him so much labour. Not a word is mentioned of it. "He layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing." He says to himself, "I am glad to carry this burden: happy to carry my lost sheep home." And oh! I do love to picture to myself at this moment the joy in the heart of the blessed Christ. "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." And now, whenever he gets a lost sheep to carry back—he rejoices. His heart leaps within him. All anxiety is gone. Fulness of delight is upon him. "He layeth it upon his shoulders rejoicing." I wonder whether the sheep could see that the Shepherd rejoiced. I do not suppose that it could; but it could feel it. There are two ways, you know, of handling a sheep, and the sheep very soon knows which expresses pleasure on its owner's part; at any rate, I am sure that a dog knows well enough what your movements mean. If you speak angrily to a sheep, and throw it upon your shoulder with indignation, that is one thing; but if you have not a word to say, except it be, "Poor thing, I am glad I have found you," and you cast it on your shoulders rejoicing, why, sheep as it is, it knows the difference. At any rate, I know that Christ has a way of saving us: oh, so gently, so lovingly, so gleefully, that he makes us happy in being saved. There is a way of turning a penny into stone or into gold according to the way in which you give it to a poor man. You can fling it at him as if he were a dog, and he will be about as grateful to you as a dog, or not so much. But there is a way in which you can say, "I am sorry for your needs. This is all I can afford you now. Take it, and do what you can with it." Given with a brotherly look, it will be gratefully received, and made the most of. There is much in the manner, as well as in the matter of a gift. The mannerism of Christ is grandly gracious: he saves us rejoicingly. It is a matter of thanksgiving to him when he gets hold of his lost sheep, and gets it on his shoulders. It makes me glad to think that it is so. We

are not saved by a grudging Christ, who seems as if he were weary of us, and must save us out of hand, to get rid of us. He does not act with us as some rude surgeon might do who says, "I will attend to you directly, but I have plenty else to do, and you *gratis* patients are a trouble." Nor does he roughly set the bone. No; Jesus comes, and, as with a lady's dainty hand, he moulds the dislocated joint; and when he sets it, there is bliss even about the method of the setting. We look into his face, and we see that he puts his tenderest sympathy into each movement. You know the different ways which workmen have. Some kind of work a man is soon sick of. The principle of division of labour is a very admirable one for the production of results upon a large scale; but it is a miserable business for the workman to have to do the same thing over and over again, all day long, as if he were an automaton. Get a man at work at a statue—an artist whose whole soul is in his chisel, who knows that there is a bright spirit within that block of marble, and who means to chip off all that hides the lovely image from his sight. See how he works! No man does a thing well who does it sorrowfully. The best work that can be, is done by the happy, joyful workman; and so it is with Christ. He does not save souls as of necessity—as though he would rather do something else if he might; but his very heart is in it, he rejoices to do it, and therefore he does it thoroughly, and he communicates his joy to us in the doing of it.

Now, learn a lesson before I go away to the third point. "When he hath found it." Suppose that any of you should very soon meet with a poor troubled sinner, anxious to come to Christ. When you have found him, let me recommend you to imitate the Master's example: get a tight grip of him. Do not let him slip. Get a hold of him; and then, if he is in trouble, take all that trouble upon yourself. Try whether you cannot get him upon your shoulders. Imitate your Master in that way. Try to bear all his burden for him, as Christ bore yours. Conduct him to the Christ who is the true burden-bearer; and all the while be very happy about it. I do not think we ought to go and talk to young converts in a dreadfully solemn tone, as though it would be something horrible to find a Saviour. They will never come again, you may depend upon it. They will give you a wide berth. But just go, and in a joyful spirit say, "I am so glad to find you caring about your soul." The best thing that can happen to a soul-seeker is to meet with a troubled conscience; show that you think so. "But," say you, "I have not the time." Always have time, even in the middle of the night, to see a poor conscience-stricken sinner. But perhaps you are very weary, or not well. If I were weary I should not be weary any longer when I came across a lost sheep; and if I were ill, I would get well on purpose to see after a sin-sick sinner. Talk in that way, with sweet and pleasant encouragement, for this is the way to help your brother sinner to the Saviour.

My time has gone, but just a few words more on this last point.

III. "WHEN HE COMETH HOME." "When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Some hurried observations. First, *heaven is a home.* "When he cometh home"; and the next verse says that it is heaven. Heaven is a home. Do you not like to think of it under that aspect? It is the home of Jesus; and if it is the home of Jesus can any other home be equal to it? "When he cometh home."

Note, next, that *lost ones are known in heaven.* I give you that thought more from the Greek than from the English here. "When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep—the lost one." That is how it should run. It is as if the friends knew that one had been lost, and the loss had been deplored: and the shepherd says, "I have found my sheep: you know which one—the lost one." Up there they know which are Christ's sheep, and which are lost. Heaven is nearer earth than some of us dream. How long does it take to get there?

"One gentle sigh the spirit breaks:
We scarce can say, 'He's gone,'
Before the ransomed spirit takes
Its mansion near the throne."

And there are more communications between earth and heaven than some folk dream; for here it is clear that when the shepherd came home he said to them, "I have found the sheep," the lost one. So they knew all about it. It is evident, again, that they all knew there that the shepherd had gone after the sheep, for he says, "I have found my sheep which was lost." They all knew that he had gone on search, and therefore they could all understand his joy when he came back with the sheep. I believe that they know in heaven when Christ is seeking after anyone. It must be a great satisfaction to some up there who die with an unconverted son, or an unconverted girl, to know, after a little while, son or daughter is converted to Christ. I am persuaded they know it. They cannot help knowing it, because they are Christ's friends and neighbours, and, according to the parable, he tells them, and he says to them, "Rejoice with me"; and if he says, "Rejoice with me," why, of course, he tells them why. You don't think that Jesus ever invited a spirit before the throne to rejoice with him, and received for answer, "I cannot do it, for I know no cause for joy." If I had been converted after my mother's death, I can fancy that when Jesus said to all of them, "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep, the lost one," my mother would say, "My Lord, I can rejoice more than any of them, for that was my boy, and he is saved at last." Your mother in glory will be twice glorified to-night, John, if you give your heart to Christ; and I pray that you may. Your father, now before the throne, will think that paradise has grown more paradisiac than ever if he hears it whispered down the golden streets that the wanderer has come home.

Notice, next, very briefly, that *Jesus Christ loves other people to rejoice with him,* so that, when he finds a sinner, he has so much love in his heart that his joy runs over, and he cries to others, "Come, friends, come neighbours, come and help me to be glad, for I have saved

another soul." Let us catch the blessed infection. If you have just heard of somebody being saved, be glad about it. Though you do not know the person, yet be glad about it, because Jesus is glad.

Notice, next, that *repentance is regarded as coming home.* This sheep was not in heaven. No, but as soon as it had been brought into the fold it is described as repenting; and Jesus and the angels begin to rejoice over it. If a man truly repents, and Christ saves him, it is clear that he never will be lost. A certain old proverb forbids us to count our chickens till they are hatched; and I do not think that angels would do so in the case of immortal souls. If they believed that repenting sinners might afterwards be lost, they would not ring the marriage bells just yet, but they would wait a while to see how things went on. If they can yet perish there is not one convert that the angels dare rejoice over; for if any child of God might fall away and perish, why not every one of us? If any one falls from grace, I fear I shall. O my brother, do you not fear the same for yourself? "No," say you, "I don't think so." Well, then, you are a proud fellow, and you are the most likely one to desert your Lord. If ever a sheep of Christ's shall fall away, I shall. I see more of my own tendencies to wander, and more of my own temptations to offend than I do of yours. I would not have the angels rejoice over a man because he repents, if repentance be only a sign of human improvement, and not a token of heavenly love. I would say, "Stop, ye angels; for this man may go back, and perish after all, if, according to the modern gospel Christ loves to-day and hates to-morrow, and a child of God may yet be a child of the devil." I do not believe a word of such doctrine. I believe that where the Lord begins the good work of grace he will carry it on, and perfect it; and when the Lord has once given to a man to know him, he will see that he is preserved in that knowledge for ever. There is a text that clenches it: "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Now, if they have eternal life, it cannot come to an end; for eternal life *is* eternal, evidently; and if they have eternal life, the Shepherd and his friends may justifiably sing when one single possessor of that eternal life is brought to life and salvation. In the penitent man a work is done that never can be undone; and he is put where he never can be lost. Yes,

> "I to the end shall endure,
> As sure as the earnest is given;
> More happy, but not more secure,
> Are the glorified spirits in heaven."

Sing away, angels! There is something to sing about now; and we will join with you in blessing and praising the unchanging God for ever and for ever. Amen.

Sown Among Thorns

"And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them"—Matthew xiii. 7.

"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful"—Matthew xiii. 22.

WHEN that which comes of his sowing is unfruitful, the sower's work is wasted: he has spent his strength for nought. Without fruit the sower's work would even seem to be insane; for he takes good wheat, throws it away, and loses it in the ground. Preaching is the idlest of occupations if the word be not adapted to enter the heart, and produce good results. O my hearers, if you are not converted, I waste time and energy in standing here! Men might well think it madness that one whole day in the week should be given up to hearing speeches: madness, indeed, it would be if nothing came of it to conscience and heart. If you do not bring forth fruit unto holiness, and the end is not everlasting life, I should be better employed in breaking stones on the road-side than in preaching to you.

Fruit-bearing made the difference appear in the various soils upon which the sower scattered seed. You would not so certainly have known the quality if you had not seen the failure or success of the seed. We do not know your hearts till we see your bearing towards the gospel. If it produces in you holiness and love to God and man, then we know that there is good soil in you: but if you are merely promising people, but not performing people, then we know that the ground of your heart is hard, or stony, or thorny. The word of the Lord tries the heart and reins of the children of men, and in this it is as the fire which distinguishes between metal and dross. O my dear hearers, you undergo a test to-day! Peradventure you will be judging the preacher, but a greater than the preacher will be judging you: for the Word itself shall judge you. You sit here as a jury upon yourselves: your own condition will be brought clearly out by the way in which you receive or refuse the gospel of God. If you bring forth fruit to the praise of God's grace, well; but if not, however you may seem to hear with attention, and may retain what you hear in your

memories, if no saving effect is produced upon your souls, we shall know that the soil of your heart has not been prepared of the Lord, but remains in its native barrenness.

What fruit have you borne hitherto from all your hearing? May I venture to put the question to each one of you very pointedly? Some of you have been hearers from your childhood—are you any the better? What long lists of sermons you must have heard by now! Count over your Sundays; how many they have been! Think of the good men now in heaven, to whom you once listened! Remember the tears that were drawn from you by their discourses! If you are not saved yet, will you ever be saved? If you are not holy yet, will you ever be holy? Why has the Lord spent so much on one who makes no return? To what purpose is this waste? Surely you will have much to answer for in that great day when the servants of God shall give in their accounts, and shall have no joy when they come to mention you. How will you excuse yourselves before God for having occasioned them so much disappointment?

At this time I will only deal with one class of you. I will not speak to those of you who hear the Word, and retain none of it because of the hardness of your hearts; such are the wayside hearers. Neither will I address myself to those who receive the truth with sudden enthusiasm, and as readily quit it when trial befalls them; such are the rocky-ground hearers. But I will deal with those of you who hear the Word attentively, and, in a sense, receive it into your hearts and understandings, so that the seed grows in you, though its fruit never comes to perfection. You are religious persons, and to all appearance you are under the influence of godliness. You exhibit plenty of leaf, but there is no corn in the ear, no substance in your Christianity. I cannot speak with any degree of physical vigour to you, by reason of the infirmity under which I struggle; but what I do say to you is steeped in earnest desire that the Lord may bless it to you. An eloquent congregation will make any preacher eloquent: help me then this morning. If you will give me your ear, you will make up for my deficiency of tongue: especially if you give to God your hearts, he will bless his truth, however feebly I may utter it.

First, I desire to talk to you a little about *the seed* which you have received; secondly about *the thorns;* thirdly about *the result.*

I. First a little about THE SEED. Remember, first, that *it was the same seed in every case.* Yonder it has brought forth thirty-fold; it was the same seed which was lost upon you. In a still better case, the seed has brought forth a hundred-fold; it was precisely the same corn with which your field has been sown. The sower went to his master's granary for all his seed; how is it that in your case it is all lost? If there were two gospels, we might expect two results without fault in the soil which failed. But with many of you to whom I speak there has been only one gospel throughout the whole of your lives. You have been attending in this house of prayer, where we have never changed our seed, but have gone on sowing the one eternal truth of God. Many have brought forth fruit a hundred-fold from the seed which has been scattered broadcast from this platform.

They heard no more than you have heard, but how much better they treated it than you have done! I want you to consider this. How covered with briars and thorns must your mind be that the gospel which converted your sister or friend never touched you! Though you may be nominally a believer in the Word of God, it has never so affected you as to make you gracious and holy. You are still a hearer only. How is this? The fault is not in the seed, for it is the same which has been so useful to others.

You have heard the gospel with *pleasure*. "Heard it!" you say, "I heard it when a little child." Your mother brought you to the house of God in her arms. You have heard it, and still hear it, though it is rather like an old song to you: but is this to be all? I am very grateful that you do hear the gospel, for I hope that one of these days God may cause it to grow in you, and yield fruit. But still a grave responsibility is upon you. Think how favoured you have been! How will you answer for this privilege if it is neglected and rendered useless by that neglect? Dear hearers, if we lived in the heart of Africa, and we died without believing in a Christ of whom we had not heard, we could not be blamed for that: but here we are in the heart of London, where the gospel is preached in all our streets, and our blood will be on our own heads if we perish. Do you mean to go down to hell? Are you so desperate that you will go thither wearing the garb of Christians? If you do persist in ruining your souls, my eyes shall follow you with tears· and when I cannot warn you any longer, I will weep in secret places because of your perversity.

Those described in my text were not only hearers, but in a measure *they accepted the good Word*. The seed fell not only on this ground, but into it, so that it began to grow. Of you it is true that you do not refuse the gospel, or raise disputes concerning it. I am glad that you have no difficulties about the inspiration of Scripture, or the Deity of our Lord, or the fact of his atonement. You do not befog yourself with "modern thought," but you avow your belief in the old, old gospel. So far so good; but what shall I make of the strange fact that your acceptance of the truth has no effect upon you? It is a very lamentable case, is it not, that a man should believe the gospel to be true, and yet should live as if it were a lie? If it be the truth, why do you not yield obedience to it? The man knows that there is an atonement for sin, but he has never confessed his sin, and accepted the great sacrifice. Those great truths, which circle about the cross like a coronet of stars, he has seen their beauty and enjoyed their brilliance, but he has never allowed their light to enter his heart, and find a reflection in his moral character. This is evil, only evil. If you believe the truth, what do you more than the devil? Nay, you are behind him, for he believes, *and trembles*, and you have not gone so far as the trembling. It should be so, that every great truth which is believed should influence the mind, sway the thoughts, and mould the life: this is the natural fruitage of great spiritual truth. The doctrine of grace, when it takes possession of the mind, and governs the heart, produces the purest results; but if it be held in unrighteousness, it is a curse rather than a blessing to have a head-

knowledge. Is it not a dreadful thing to believe God's revelation without receiving God's Spirit? This is to accept a well, but never to drink of the water; accept corn in the barn, and yet die of hunger. God have mercy upon the possessors of a dead faith!

The seed sown among thorns *lived and continued to grow.* And in many men's minds the gospel of divine truth is growing after a fashion: they understand it better, can defend it more valorously, and speak of it more fluently. Moreover, it does influence them in some form and degree, for gross vices are forsaken. They are decent imitations of believers: you can see the shape of an ear: the stalk has struggled up through the thorns until you can see its head, and are led to expect corn. But go to that apparent wheat-ear, and feel it: there are the sheaths, but there is nothing in them; you have all the makings of an ear of wheat, but it will yield no grain. I would speak to those before me who, perhaps, have been baptized, and are members of the church; I want to ask of them a question or two. Do you not think that there is a great deal of empty profession nowadays? Do you not think that many have a name to live and are dead? "Yes," say you, "I know a neighbour whom I judge to be in that condition." May not another neighbour judge the same of you? Would it not be well to raise the question about yourself? Have you really believed in the Lord Jesus? Are you truly converted from sin and self? Turn that sharp eye of yours homeward for a while. Examine your own actions, and judge your condition by them. Put yourself into the crucible. O my God, what if I should be a preacher to others, and should be myself a castaway! Will not every deacon and elder, and every individual church-member, speak to himself after the same fashion. You will go to your Sunday-school class this afternoon; will you be teaching the children what you do not know? You mean to go to a meeting this evening, and talk to others about conversion; will you be exhorting them to that which you have never yourself experienced? Will it be so? You do not need fine preaching, but you do need probing in the conscience. A thorough examination will do the healthy no harm, and it may bless the sick. "Lord, let me know the worst of my case," is one of my frequent prayers, and I suggest it to you.

So much then about the seed: it was good seed, it was sown, it was received by the soil, it grew and promised well, but yet in the end it was unfruitful. No doubt multitudes, who receive Christianity, become regular attendants at our place of worship, and are honest in their moral character; but Christ is not all in all to them; he holds a very secondary place in their affections. Their wheat is overshadowed with a thicket of thorns, and is so choked that it comes to nothing. Their religion is buried beneath their worldliness. Sad will their end be. God in mercy save us from such a doom!

II. But now, secondly, I would speak a little about THE THORNS. They are by Matthew described as "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches." Luke adds, "and pleasures of this life"; and Mark still further mentions, "the lusts of other things." I suppose that the sower did not see any thorns when he threw the handful of corn; they had all been cut down level with the surface.

He probably hoped that it was all good ground, and therefore he sowed it, little suspecting that the thorns were in possession.

Note well that *thorns are natural to the soil.* Since the fall these are the first-born children of the ground. Any evil which hinders religion is not at all an extraordinary thing—it is what we ought to expect among fallen men. Grace is an exotic; thorns are indigenous. Sin is very much at home in the human heart; and, like an ill weed, it grows apace. If you wish to go to heaven, I might take a little time to show you the way, and I should need to stir you up to diligence; but if you must needs go to hell—well, "easy is the way to destruction"—it is only a little matter of neglect. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Evil things are easy things: for they are natural to our fallen nature. Right things are rare flowers that need cultivation. If any of you are being injured by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, I am not astonished; it is natural that it should be so. Therefore, be on your guard against these mischiefs. I pray you say to yourself, "Come, there is something in this man's talk. He is very slow and dull, but still there is something in what he says. I may, after all, be tolerating those thorns in my heart which will kill the good seed, for I am of like passions and infirmities with other men." I beseech you look to yourselves, that you be not deceived at the last.

The thorns were already established in the soil. They were not only the natural inhabitants of the soil, but they were rooted and fixed in it. Our sins within us claim the freehold of our faculties, and they will not give it up if they can help it. They will not give way to the Holy Spirit, or to the new life, or to the influences of divine grace, without a desperate struggle. The roots of sin run through and through our nature, grasp it with wonderful force, and keep up their grasp with marvellous tenacity. O my dear hearer, whoever you may be, you are a fallen creature! If you were the Pope himself, or the President of the United States, or the Queen of England, it would be true of you that you were born in sin, and shapen in iniquity, and your unregenerate heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. The established church of the town of Mansoul has the devil for its archbishop. Sin has enclasped our nature as a boa-constrictor encircles its victim; and when it has maintained its hold for twenty, forty, or sixty years, I hope you are not so foolish as to think that holy things will easily get the mastery. Our evil nature is radically conservative, and it will endeavour to crush out every attempt at a revolution by which the grace of God should reign through righteousness. Wherefore, watch and pray, lest temptation choke that which is good in you. Watch earnestly, for grace is a tender plant in a foreign soil, in an uncongenial clime; while sin is in its own element, and is strongly rooted in the soil.

Do you know why so many professing Christians are like the thorny ground? It is because processes have been omitted which would have gone far to alter the condition of things. It was the husbandman s business to uproot the thorns, or burn them on the spot. Years ago, when people were converted, there used to be such a thing as conviction of sin. The great subsoil plough of soul-anguish was

used to tear deep into the soul. Fire also burned in the mind with exceeding heat: as men saw sin, and felt its dreadful results, the love of it was burned out of them. But now we are dinned with braggings about rapid salvations. As for myself, I believe in instantaneous conversions, and I am glad to see them; but I am still more glad when I see a thorough work of grace, a deep sense of sin, and an effectual wounding by the law. We shall never get rid of thorns with ploughs that scratch the surface. Those fields grow the best corn which are best ploughed. Converts are likely to endure when the thorns cannot spring up because they have been ploughed up. Dear hearer, are you undergoing today a very severe conviction of sin? Thank God for it. Are you in awful trouble and anguish? Do not think that a calamity has happened to you. May God himself continue to plough you, and then sow you, and make sure work in you for years to come! So you see these thorns were natives, and old-established natives, and it would have been well had they been cut up.

The thorns were bound to grow. There is an awful vitality in evil. First the thorns sent up a few tiny shoots. These shoots branched out, and more and more came to keep them company, till the wheat stood as a lonely thing in a thicket of briars, and was more and more overtopped and shadowed by them. The thorns aspired to the mastery, and they soon obtained it; and that done, they set to work to destroy the wheat. They blocked it up, crowded it out, and some of the thorn-shoots twisted around it, and held the wheat by the neck till it was choked.

The thorns sucked away all the nutriment from the wheat, and it was starved; for there is only a certain quantity of nourishment in the soil, and if the thorns have it, the wheat must go without it. There is only a certain amount of thought and energy in a man; and if the world gets it, Christ cannot have it. If our thoughts run upon care and pleasure, they cannot be eager about true religion: is not that clear? That is the way in which those thorns served the wheat; they starved it by devouring its food, and they choked it by keeping off the air and sun; and the poor thing became shrivelled and weak, and quite unable to produce the grain which the sower expected of it. So it is with many professing Christians. They are at first worldly, but not so very worldly. They are fairly religious, though by no means too zealous. They seek the pleasures of the world, but by no means quite so much as others we could name. But very soon the thorns grow, and it becomes doubtful which will win, sin or grace, the world or Christ. Two masters there cannot be; and in this case it is specially impossible, since neither of the contending powers will brook a rival. Sin has sprung from a royal, though evil stock, and if it be in the heart, it will struggle for the throne. So it came to pass that the tares, being tolerated, choked the good seed.

Let me describe these thorns a little. Putting together Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find that there were four sorts of thorns. The first is called "*The care of this world.*" This assuredly comes to the poor: they are apt to grow anxious and mistrustful about temporal things. "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Wherewithal

shall we be clothed?" This trinity of doleful questions much afflicts many. But anxiety comes to rich people also. Care dwells with wealth as well as with poverty. "How shall I get more? How shall I lay it up? How shall I still increase it?"—and so on. It is "the care of the age" which we are most warned against. Each age has its own special fret. It is not a care for God—that is not the care of any age; but the care of the age is some vanity or another, and as a standing thing it is the ambition to keep up with your fellows, to be respectable, and to keep up appearances. This is the care which eats as doth a canker in the case of many. Grim care turns many a black hair white, and furrows many a brow. If you let care grow in your soul, it will choke up your religion: you cannot care for God and for Mammon too. "We must have care," says one. There is a care which is proper, and there is an anxiety which is improper. That is proper care which you can cast upon God—"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." That is an improper care which you dare not take to God, but have to bear yourself. Take heed of anxiety; it will eat the heart out of your religion.

There were others who felt "*the deceitfulness of riches.*" Our Lord does not say "riches," but "the deceitfulness of riches." The two things grow together: riches are evermore deceitful. They deceive people in the getting of them, for they judge matters very unfairly when a prospect of gain is before them. The jingle of the charming guinea, or of "the almighty dollar," makes a world of difference to the ear when it is hearing a case. Men cannot afford to lose by integrity, and so they take the doubtful way, and either sail near the wind, or speculate till it amounts to gambling. They would not endure the idea of such conduct, were it not that the hope of gain deceives them. Our line of conduct ought never to be ruled by gain or loss. Do right if the heavens fall. Do no wrong, even though a kingdom should be its reward. Men turn to Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," a wonderful book, and there they find certain laws which I believe to be as fixed and unalterable as the laws of gravitation; led on by the deceitfulness of riches, men make these laws into an excuse for grinding the faces of the poor. They might as well take people to the top of a rock, fling them down, and dash them to pieces, and then cry out, "This is the natural result of the law of gravitation." Of course, the law of gravitation operates remorselessly, and so will the law of supply and demand; but we must not use either of these laws as a cover for cruelty to the poor and needy: yet many do so through "the deceitfulness of riches."

Riches are very deceitful when they are gained, for they breed in men many vices which they do not themselves suspect. One man is purse-proud, but he thinks he is humble. He is a self-made man, and worships him that made him. Is it not natural that a man should worship his maker? In his heart he thinks: "I am somebody. I came up to London with half-a-crown in my pocket, and now I could buy a whole street!" People ought to respect a man of that kind, ought they not, even though he may have made his money by very queer practices? It little matters how you make money

nowadays: only get it, and you will have plenty of admirers, and the deceitfulness of riches will enable you to admire yourself. With pride comes a desire for wealthy society and vain company; and thus again religion receives severe injury. There is apt to grow up in the mind an idolatry of this world and its treasures. "I don't love money," says one. "You know it is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of it." Just so; but are you sure that you do not love it? Your thoughts run a good deal after it. You hug it rather closely, and you find it hard to part with it. I will not accuse you; but I would have you awake to the fact that riches worm themselves into a man's heart before he is well aware of it.

You may perceive the deceitfulness of riches if you note the excuses which men make for getting so much and withholding it from the cause of God. "They intend to do a great deal of good with it." Did you hear the devil laugh? I am not speaking of many dear brethren in this place who are doing a great deal of good with their means; but I am speaking of those who are simply living to accumulate wealth, and say that they will one day do a great deal of good with it. They say so. Will it ever be more than saying? I fear that in this thing many rich men deceive themselves. They go on accumulating the means, but never using them: making bricks, but never building. All they will get will be a corner in "The Illustrated London News" to say that they died worth so much. O sirs, how can you be content thus to have your good things choked? Wherever this deceitfulness of riches is allowed the upper hand, it chokes the good seed. A man cannot be eager to get, and eager to keep, and eager to increase, and eager to become a millionaire, and at the same time be a true servant of the Lord Jesus. As the body grows rich the soul grows poor.

Luke tells us of another kind of weed, namely, "*the pleasures of this life.*" I am sure that these thorns play a dreadful part nowadays. I have nothing to say against recreation in its proper place. Certain forms of recreation are needful and useful; but it is a wretched thing when amusement becomes a vocation. Amusement should be used to do us good "like a medicine": it must never be used as the food of the man. From early morning till late at night some spend their time in a round of frivolities, or else their very work is simply carried on to furnish them funds for their pleasures. This is vicious. Many have had all holy thoughts and gracious resolutions stamped out by perpetual trifling. Pleasure so called is the murderer of thought. This is the age of excessive amusement: everybody craves for it, like a babe for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men had something better to live for than silly sports. The thorns are choking the age.

Mark adds, "*and the lusts of other things.*" I will not enumerate all those other things; but all things except the things of Christ and of the Father are "other things." If anybody spends his life on any object, however good, short of the glory of God, the good seed is choked by the inferior object. One person is eminently scientific, and he will do well if his science is used for holy purposes; but it can be used to choke the seed. One man is a great proficient in the arts, and

he does well if the arts are used as a mule for Christ to ride upon; but if art is to ride upon Christ, then it is ill enough. I met with a clergyman many years ago who was going a long distance to find a new beetle. He was a great entomologist, and I did not blame him for it, for to a thoughtful man entomology may yield many profitable lessons. But if he neglected his preaching to catch insects, then I do not wonder that a parishioner should wish that the beetles would nibble his old sermons, for they were very stale. I call it choking the seed when any inferior pursuit becomes the master of our minds, and the cause of God and truth takes a secondary place. The seed is choked in our souls whenever Christ is not our all in all. You see my drift: be it what it may—gain, glory, study, pleasure—all these may be briers that will choke the seed.

Mr. Jay was never more pleased than when at Bristol he had a note sent up to him which ran as follows:—"A young man, who is prospering in business, begs the prayers of God's people that prosperity may not be a snare to him." Take care that you look thus upon your prosperity. My dear friend, Dr. Taylor, of New York, speaks of some Christians nowadays as having a "butterfly Christianity." When time, and strength, and thought, and talent are all spent upon mere amusement, what else are men and women but mere butterflies? "Society" is just a mass of idle people, keeping each other in countenance. O dear hearers, surely we did not come into this world to play away our days! I do not think we came into this world either to slave ourselves to death, or to rust away in laziness. We have come here as a man enters into the porch that he may afterwards enter the house. This life is the doorway to the palace of heaven. Pass through it in such style that you may enter before the King with holy joy. If you give your minds and thoughts to these passing things, be they what they may, you will ruin your souls, for the good seed cannot grow.

III. So I close in the last place by noticing THE RESULT. The seed was unfruitful.

These briers and thorns could not pull the seed up, or throw it away: it remained where it was, but they choked it. So it may be that your business, your cares, your pleasures, have not torn up your religion by the roots—it is there still, such as it is. But these things suffocate your better feelings. A man that is choked is not good for much. If a thief gets into his house, and he desires to defend his property, what can he do while he is choked? He must wait till he gets his breath again. What an amount of choked religion we have around us! It may be alive: I do not know whether it is or not; but it looks very black in the face. God save you from having your religion choked!

I have already told you it was drained of all its sustenance. Look at many Christians; I call them Christians, for they call themselves so. A boy in the streets, selling mince-pies, kept crying, "Hot mince-pies!" A person bought one of them, and found it quite cold. "Boy," said he, "why did you call these pies hot?" "That's the name they go by, sir," said the boy. So there are plenty of people that are called Christians, but they are not Christians—that's the name they

go by; but all the substance is drained out of them by other matters. You see the shape of a Christian, the make of a Christian, and some of the talk of a Christian, but the fruit of a Christian is not there. That is the result of the choking by the thorns of care, riches, pleasure, and worldliness in general.

What life there was in the wheat was very sickly. Let me remind certain persons that their spiritual life is growing weak at this time. Morning prayer this morning, how long did it take? Do not grow red in the face. I will say no more about it. You are not coming out to-night, are you? Half a Sunday is enough worship for you. Would you not like to live in some country place, where you did not need to go out to a place of worship even once? Bible-reading, how much do you do of that? Family prayer, is that a delight to you? Why, numbers of so-called Christians have given up family religion altogether. How about week-day services? You are not often at a prayer-meeting. No, the distance is too great! Thursday night service? "Well, well, you see I might come, but there happens to be a lawn-tennis party that night." Will you come in the winter? "Yes, I would, but then a friend drops in, and we have an evening at bagatelle." How many there are in this condition! I am not going to judge them; but I remember that an eminent minister used to say, "When week-day services are forsaken, farewell to the life of godliness." Such people never seem to bathe in their religion, but they give themselves a wetting with the end of the towel; thus they try to look decent, but they are not inwardly cleansed.

As to confessing Christ before men, many fail altogether. If you were pushed into a corner, and were asked if you were a Christian, you would say, "Well, I do go to a place of worship," but you are by no means anxious to own the soft impeachment. Our Salvation Army friends are not ashamed of their religion; why should you be? Our Quaker friends used to wear broad brims, but they are very properly giving up their peculiar garb: I hope it is not to be to you an indication that you may conceal your religion, and be as much as possible like the world. Do you hope to be soldiers, and yet never wear your regimentals? This is one of the marks of feeble religion.

When it comes to defending the gospel, where do you see it in this age? I hoped that many would be found among Baptists who would care for the truth; but now I come to the conclusion that it is with many, as with the showman, when asked which was Wellington, and which was Buonaparte: "Whichever you please, my little dears. Pay your money, and take your choice!" Free will or free grace, human merit or Christ's atonement, it does not matter now. New theology or old theology, human speculation or divine revelation—who minds? What do they care whether God's truth stands or the devil's lies? I am weary of these drivellers! The thorns have choked the seed in the pulpits and in the churches as well as in private individuals. Oh, that God would return! Oh, that his Spirit would raise up among us men who believe indeed, and prove the power of their belief!

The fruit of much modern piety is *nil*. I sat down one day with three or four old Christian men. We had no sooner met than we began to speak of the providential dealings of God with his people: we

related instances of answers to prayer, and we spoke of the sovereign grace of God, and his faithfulness to his saints. When we had gone a little forward in the conversation, one remarked how he had enjoyed the talk. "Alas!" said he, "nobody talks about God now: his providence and his readiness to hear prayer are seldom mentioned now: the talk is all about the markets, and the weather, and Home Rule, and Mr. Gladstone, and Disestablishment; but little enough about the Lord Jesus Christ." That witness was true. In old times the Lord's people spake often one to another, and the Lord stood at the window and listened:—"The Lord hearkened, and heard it." He liked their talk so well, that he said he would print it—"A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." Where do you get experimental Christian talk now? The thorns choke holy communion upon the best things.

Fervent prayer! Mighty prayer! Where do you meet with it? Thank God, we have some brethren here whose prayers could unlock the windows of heaven, or shut them up; but it is not so with many. Go to the prayer-meetings of most of the churches. What poor things! Of course I find in country places that many drop the prayer-meeting during hay-time and harvest. In London they do not drop the prayer-meetings in summer, because they are too small to need dropping: they take up the fragment of a prayer-meeting and mend with it the worn-out lecture, so that it becomes neither lecture nor prayer-meeting. How can we expect a blessing when we are too lazy to ask for it? Is it not evidence of a dying religion when, to cover their carelessness about meeting for prayer, we even hear ministers doubting the value of prayer-meetings, and calling them "religious expedients"?

Where do you meet with intense enjoyment of the things of God? The spiritual life is low when there is little delight in holy service. Oh, for the old Methodistic fire! Oh, to feel our hearts dance at the sound of Jesus' name! Oh, to flame up like beacon fires, and blaze towards heaven with holy ecstasy! It is a sorrowful day when religion goes abroad without wearing her ornaments of joy. When an army has left its flag behind, it has evidently given up all idea of victory.

If there is a declension in spiritual life, we cannot expect to see deeds of holy consecration. Oh, for men and women who bring their alabaster boxes to Jesus! I am glad when I hear this kind of lamentation. "My dear sir, I have not done for the Lord what I ought to have done. I have been a believer now for many years, but I have not given to his cause what I ought to have given; tell me what I can do." There are hopeful signs in such enquiries, and therefore they are well; but it would be better to begin early, and avoid such regrets.

I would put it to you, my dear hearer, have you been fruitful? Have you been fruitful with your wealth? Have you been fruitful with your talent? Have you been fruitful with your time? What are you doing for Jesus now? Salvation is not by doings, you are saved by grace; but if you are so saved, prove it by your devoted lives. Consecrate yourself anew this day wholly to your Master's

service. You are not your own, but bought with a price; and if you would not be like these thorn-choked seeds, live while you live, with all-consuming zeal.

"Well," says one, "but there are the thorns." I know there are: they were here when our blessed Lord came among us, and they made him a cruel crown. Are you going to grow more of them? May I urge you to give up cultivating thorns? They are useless; they come to no good. Whatever the pursuit is, short of the glory of God, it is a thorn, and there is no use in it. It will in the end be painful to you as it was to your Lord. A thorn will tear your flesh, ay, tear your heart. Specially when you come to die will these thorns be in your pillow. Even if you die in the Lord, it will grieve your heart to think you did not live more to Jesus. If you live for these things, you will rue the day, for they are like thorns, painful in the getting, painful in the keeping, and painful in the extraction: you who have had a thorn in your hand know what I mean. Worldly cares come with pain, they stay with pain, and they go with pain.

Still, there is a use for thorns. What is that use? First, if you have thorns about you to-day, make a child's use of them. What does a child do? If he gets a thorn in his finger, he looks at it, and cries. How it smarts! Then he runs off to his mother. That is one of the sweet uses of his adversity, it admits him to his mother at once. She might say, "What are you coming in for? Run about the garden." But he cries, "Please, mother, I've got a thorn in my finger." This is quite enough argument to secure him the best attention of the queen of the house. See how tenderly she takes out the little dagger! Let your cares drive you to God. I shall not mind if you have many of them if each one leads you to prayer. If every fret makes you lean more on the Beloved, it will be a benefit. Thus make good use of the thorns.

Another service to which thorns may be put is to make a hedge of them, to keep the goats of worldly pleasure from eating the young shoots of your graces. Let the sorrows of life keep off temptations which else might do you serious mischief.

May we meet in heaven! Oh, may we all meet in heaven! What a congregation I have addressed this morning! I feel overawed as I look at you. From the ends of the earth have many of you come. The Lord bless you! Strangers are here in vast numbers, for the most of our regular hearers are at the sea-side. I may never see you again on earth. May we all meet in heaven, where thorns will never grow! May we be gathered by the angels in that day when the Lord shall say, "Gather the wheat into my barn"! Amen. So let it be.

The Seed upon Stony Ground

"And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away"—Mark iv. 5, 6.

THE gospel seed, according to the parable, falls upon all kinds of soil. Some of its precious grains drop upon the hard pathway, some upon the rock, some amongst the thorns, and only a portion, perhaps a smaller proportion than one in four, falls upon good ground, in which it finds a congenial abiding-place. The preacher, therefore, will not meet with unmixed success in all directions. He may look for a full recompense from his work as a whole, but he must not fondly suppose that everywhere the good word will become effectual; for in many it will be a savour of death unto death, and not of life unto life. Even when Jesus preached but few received him, and of Paul's ministry it is recorded that "some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." It is for the beginner in holy service to go forward with reasonable expectations, lest he should ere long weary of the work and leave it because of his bitter disappointments.

Mark, with care, that the sower in the parable is not blamed for having scattered his seed upon soil which proved to be unproductive; not a word of censure is recorded against him on that account; from which it is fair to infer that he did no more and no less than his duty, and that the minister of Christ is to scatter the seed of the gospel broadcast among all mankind. It is God's work to direct the saving word into the chosen hearts which he has prepared to receive it, but as for us, we are to preach the gospel to every creature, and going out into the streets and lanes of the city, as many as we find we are to bid to the supper. Many are called but few are chosen; it was never intended that the external call should be as narrow as the election; yet there are some ministers whose preaching consists far more of an analysis of soils than of a sowing of seed. Leaving the analyzing of the soil to God, I take my commission from his hands and desire

to fulfil it. Stony-ground hearer, there is a handful of seed for you; you who are hard like the trodden road, there is a handful for you; and even among the thorns, which are plentiful enough in this age, shall the good seed fall like a heavenly shower; and if God shall graciously direct it to his own chosen, and they, like the good ground, shall receive it, it will be his doing, it will never be effected by any skill of mine. It is mine to sow beside all waters, and his to give the increase. The best shot that was ever made with bow and arrow was taken at a venture, and Ahab the king was pierced between the joints of his harness; so also, while drawing my bow to preach the gospel to every creature, my faith feels confident that the Lord will direct the arrow and effect his purposes of grace.

I feel that I have very solemn work on hand. I have always pleasure in preaching upon encouraging topics, but this morning my themes are for sifting and testing. We have to deal with certain apparently good people, and to show that they are not what they seem. We have to put corn from the barn-floor into the sieve, and it may be there will be much chaff to be blown away; this is an operation not pleasant to the flesh, and one which needs much of the Spirit of God that we may perform it aright, lest the weak ones be sorely troubled, which is far enough from our desire. Solemn discourse should have a solemn heart to utter it, and solemn hearts to hear it: may God grant it may be so at this time, that the sermon may be greatly profitable to every one of us, whether professors of the gospel or not.

First, we shall *read the history of stony-ground hearers;* secondly, we shall *mark the radical defect of their character;* and, thirdly, we shall try to *learn a lesson* from the whole.

I. First, we have here A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CERTAIN PROFESSORS OF RELIGION. Let us read it carefully. It is said of them, first, that *they heard the word.* "These are they which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness." They enjoyed the great privilege of hearing God's word. They heard the real gospel, they did not attend upon ritualistic falsehoods, or philosophic speculations: it was *the* word which they heard. The sower did not sow tares, but he sowed good corn. How happy are those who sit under a downright gospel ministry! May God be pleased to multiply such ministries everywhere, and the lovers of them! How can we expect salvation to come to us if we do not hear the soul-saving gospel? If we are listening merely to opinions and notions and philosophies and superstitions, and not to the very word of God, we cannot expect to find salvation. The Holy Ghost does not save men by means of lies, but if we hear the truth as it is in Jesus, we may hope that he will make it effectual to our conversion.

Remember, next, that hearing is not enough. "Hearers only" will not enter heaven; there must be a doing of the word as well as a hearing of it. These people were good hearers, capital hearers, for they went further than hearing—*they received the word;* not in the divine power or supernatural efficacy of it, but they nevertheless received it, that is to say, they never cavilled at it, they assented to it as they heard it, and recognised it as God's truth. Receiving it, it produced an effect upon them. They were, in a measure, impressed by it.

If the sermon spoke of the wrath of God on account of sin, they were alarmed if it told them of the love of God in Christ Jesus, they were encouraged. They did not always hear with dry eyes ; they were not always like the seats they sat upon, unmoved and stolid ; but they received the word, it stirred their affections and their emotions, they felt its moving effects, and were thus led to many changes of life. They went home and swept the chambers which had been full of filthiness ; they cleansed, at any rate, the outside of their cups and platters, and took care that the sepulchre, if not cleansed of the dead men's bones, should be decently whitewashed, so as to shock no passer by. They were improved and reformed externally by what they heard, and so far they received it.

And there is this said about them, in the third place, that they *received it immediately.* In them it excited no questions, doubts, or conflicts. The preacher said, "This the word of God," and they were content to believe him, though they knew not why. While other minds were asking for the authority of the message, and then, having recognised the authority, were battling hard with a thousand difficulties, these persons saved themselves a world of trouble by never thinking at all. It was their father's religion and their mother's religion, therefore they believed it, they swallowed the pill with their eyes shut, caring nothing whether it was God's truth or Satan's lie. Anything like spiritual mastication of the doctrine they did not attempt, but they endorsed wholesale whatever they were taught. Priests themselves could not desire more plastic material. These hearers had no hard strugglings to get at the Saviour, no sense of sin to hold them back, no horrors of conscience to make them afraid, no alarms lest they should not be the Lord's own people after all, no testings and siftings to see whether they possessed real repentance and acceptable faith. They sprang into religion as a man may leap into a bath, head over heels at once. They said, "Surely this is the right thing, and we will have it ;" and after a certain sort they did have it : not with any depth of consideration or weight of judgment, but immediately they received the word.

It is added, *they received it with gladness.* The immediate effect of receiving the word was to make them very happy ; and there are not a few who suppose that to be made very happy is a sure sign of being converted. Believe me, it is a very dubious sign indeed. No doubt, one grand effect of the reception of the gospel into the heart is to bring joy and peace through believing, but there are many kinds of joy, and many sorts of peace ; and there is a joy which is not the fruit of grace, but the growth of nature, and a peace which comes from delusion, and not from the Spirit of God. We must take care we do not conclude that we are safe because we are "so happy." The rich man who went to hell was happy when he fared sumptuously every day ; the farmer, who said he would pull down his barns and build greater, was happy when he surveyed his stores ; and so was the prodigal son happy while he was spending his living riotously but theirs was a very different kind of joy from that which is the fruit of the Spirit. The characters in our text looked at the happy side of religion exclusively. "There," said the stony-ground hearer, "there

is my mother; what a happy Christian she is. I have seen her in deep trial borne up by the Spirit of God; I have marked her when we have had deaths in the house, and seen how peaceful and quiet she has been: I will lay hold on Christ, for then I shall be as happy as she is." These stony-ground hearers thought what a happy thing it must be to be forgiven; and so, indeed, it is, but they dwelt upon that alone. To be pardoned, to be a child of God, to be accepted in the Beloved, what precious things these must be! And what a delightful thing to be numbered with God's saints, to go to the communion table, and to be thought much of in the church! Are not all these ways of pleasantness? And to go to heaven at last, to die triumphantly, to be taken up to dwell where Jesus is amidst the glory; what joyful things! Who doubts it? But these people dwelt only upon this view of the matter, and did not recollect that between this and heaven there are temptations to be combatted and to be overcome, trials to be endured, stern trials, too, through which we can only be brought by divine help. Right arms must be cut off, and right eyes must be plucked out; there are costs to be counted, and reckonings to be made, as to whether the future will repay for the labours of the present. Youthful Hopefuls vow that they will have the brave country of Canaan, but they do not recollect the roughness of the road thither. Like Pliable, they set out for the Celestial City, but they have not reckoned upon the Slough of Despond, and therefore after the first mouthful of mud they are ready to turn back, and let those have the brave country who care for it; as for them, if they can keep whole bones in their body, they will be well content to let the future go as it may.

These people, then, immediately received the word with joy. How hopeful all this must have looked to the sower! Do you not see how easily ministers may be deceived? When you have only to preach, and men are willing to hear; only to preach and men are willing to receive,—to receive the gospel at once, without causing you any difficulty in arguing with them; when they receive it with gladness, and you have not the trouble to cheer them up, and to meet their doubts and anxieties with a thousand promises selected out of the word of God; is not this splendid work, which will richly repay the sower? Alas, we must not reckon our fruit by our buds! All is not gold that glitters, and it is not every egg that will be hatched.

We read yet further that these characters *made rapid progress*,—they sprang up because they had no depth of earth; because of their shallow soil they were very rapid in their growth. These people heard the gospel one day, received it, and felt sure that they were saved; at once they were full of joy and transport, and hastened to make a profession. They did not require time to sit down and see whether they could bear out that profession, or seek grace that they might not run before they were called; but away they went, just as if a spark had been dropped into so much powder. They made a profession, and the next week they were teaching in the Sunday-school. They were so sure they were on the right road, that they were very vexed with other pilgrims who did not travel so rapidly. When they heard of Christians being anxious as to their condition, they said, "What nonsense! What reason was there for it?" If they saw a deep-taught Christian tremblingly examining

himself, they said, "Oh, you must not look at all at yourself; never consider what is going on within." They had received a one-sided gospel only, and that quite contented them; but as to anything like the work of the Spirit of God in the soul, and the holy jealousy which is one of the best fruits of vital godliness, these they quite dispensed with. They were going to drag the church behind them, and drive the world before them; and very soon they would distance even the ministry which had been the means, as they said, of their conversion. They grew from hyssops on the wall to cedars of Lebanon in about a week. They were THE men, and wisdom would die with them. Grand work to have to deal with these men, is not it? We shall see by-and-by, and shall have to learn that not every stem that puts forth leaves is a fruit-bearing branch.

In due time, according to the parable, *came the trial*. The seed was up, and soon the sun was up too, and began to scorch it. None will get to heaven without being tried on the road. Ask concerning those who stand in their white robes before the throne of God, who are those, and whence came they? And the answer will be, "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." There is not a fragment of gold in all God's temple but what has passed through the fire. Untried faith is no faith, untried grace is no grace. God will try his people and discern between the precious and the vile.

According to the Saviour's explanation of the text, the trial came in the form of persecution. Ah! how many there are who have received the word with gladness, who, if there were a stake in Smithfield, would very soon drop the profession of Christianity, for it would be too hot for them; or if there were a prison ready for them in which they must lie till the moss grew on their eyelids, they would soon forsake the truth and turn aside to error. We need not be much afraid of the revival of such tests, but there are other forms of persecution which mere professors are equally unable to bear. A sneer in society; a remark against Christianity from a person whom you are accustomed to respect; a look from someone who is above you in wealth, as he despises you for professing to be a follower of Christ; unkind remarks from a father, opposition from a husband, the desertion of some young companion with whom you hoped your life would be linked; such matters—nothing like the stake or the prison—are yet quite sufficient to overcome flimsy professors, so that they are offended, and turn their backs upon the religion which they once so quickly espoused. In many instances to follow principle would involve a great loss in business: they could not afford to incur such a loss. If Christ could be had at a cheaper rate, they would have him, but to lose all the treasures in Egypt! No, they could not do that, and so they renounce again that Christ whom they once called their all-in-all.

With others it has not been such a trial as that, but providential affliction. I painfully remember a man and his wife, who were members of this church for some time, and it was certainly true, as they affirmed, that from the very hour they made profession of religion they began to be in trouble; and therefore they renounced the consolation because of the affliction, for they drew the conclusion that surely they

could not be the people of God, or else God would not have so tried them, a conclusion the reverse of the teachings of Scripture. Many will have Christ if he will pat them on the cheek, but not if he flog them with the rod. They will follow the Lord while he is on the giving hand, but they cannot believe in a God who takes away. They can bless him while he enriches them, but they know nothing of that Job-like faith which exclaims, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Or, perhaps, it may be that when they first made a profession of religion they did not know much about the temptations of life, but now they have moved from home, they have obtained a situation where there are young men who tell them of haunts of pleasurable vice; or they have left the circle of godly people in which they once moved, and are cast amongst ungodly ones, and, alas, their mouths are watering for the sweets of the world: the basilisk of sinful pleasure has cast a spell over them, and now Christ may go for Belial, true religion for worldliness, and following God for the indulgence of the flesh. Ah, how often is this the case!

Or, perhaps, another shining of the sun has come upon them. They thought they believed the gospel, but they have fallen among debaters; they are surrounded by a sceptical circle, where they have heard arguments they never heard before, and never having weighed anything, or considered the reasons why they believed in God and in Christ, they are quite staggered. They have no depth of earth, no root-hold of the truth by conviction, and solemn judgment of it; and so as soon as they meet with an atheist or a deist, or a sceptic of any form, they are like thistledown before the wind. Having no ballast in their vessel, the first breeze oversets them and they are lost. What a grand thing it is to be established in the faith, rooted, grounded, settled. I remember reading of one who said, "When I read the arguments brought by infidels against the gospel, I laugh them to scorn, because they are nothing like so deep, cunning, or hard to answer, as the arguments which my own heart has brought against the Lord in years gone by, which having answered and overcome, I feel myself more than a match for the puny oppositions of ungodly men." It is a grand thing not to be moved in these sceptical times, but to know the Lord by secret intercourse with him, to know his truth by inner consciousness, and by a devout reading of his word with eyes opened from above. Alas, many hearers and receivers of the word have been destroyed by carping infidels; they knew nothing thoroughly, and so were readily deceived.

It is said of the stony-ground people that *immediately they were offended.* They were just as soon out of love with the gospel as they were in with it. "Immediately they were offended." They did not at first stop to enquire why they should be Christians, and now they do not stop to argue why they should renounce their profession. They took their religion hot from the oven, and dropped it before it was cool enough to feed on. Somebody said, "Believe, believe, believe!" and they were excited; and now another speaker says, "Do not believe; do not believe!" and they are excited the other way. They went in with a crowd of others all on a sudden during a revival; and now they

are going out with the crowd during a season of lukewarmness. The minister took them in at the front door, and now he has to let them out at the back door. They have disappointed him, they have brought scandal upon the church, and double responsibility upon themselves, and now they are just as earnest to give up religion as they were to profess it. Unhappy souls, volatile in everything, frivolous about the solemnities of eternity, ready to be right if rightly led, and as ready to be wrong if wrongly driven. Having no mind of their own, they are molluscous creatures—without a backbone, mere jelly-fish ; nothing solid or consistent can be found in them. Their sand-built houses are no sooner up than they are washed down by the tide ; they have no rocky foundations, no strong grips of truth, no principles ; their motive powers are submission to persuasion, admiration of eloquence, and desire of approbation. Unhappy ! Unhappy ! Unhappy ! God grant that we may not belong to such a class.

II. I shall show THEIR RADICAL DEFECT. Their radical defect, in the first place, lay in *an unbroken heart.* The parable does not refer to ground with stones in it, such as we commonly call stony ground, for that will grow corn well enough, but to soil where there was a hard rock underneath, and only a very thin covering of earth. A hard pan of iron rock was at the bottom, and it was barely hidden by a little mould created by the lichens and mosses, enough to catch the seed and make it germinate, but not enough to feed its roots for any length of time. In these people their hearts have never been broken. "Is not my word like a hammer, saith the Lord ?" They do not know, for it never hammered them. They got their joy and peace without a blow. What is to be done with a piece of ground which has the rock so close to the surface ? Nothing can be done with it by man. The only thing that can be done is for God to come in, and when God in his infinite mercy changes the rock into good soil, then the wheat will grow, but not till then. "A new heart also will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." There must be a work of the Holy Ghost by which the natural rock of nature shall be turned into the good soil of grace, or else all the sowing in the world will never produce a harvest. These people skipped over that, and in fact they did not like to hear of it. They liked preachers who always preached simple faith in the work of Jesus, but never mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit,—lopsided preachers, messengers whose legs are not equal, who deliver half God's message and no more : and under such teaching they found peace without soul-trouble, and comfort without the new birth. As for repentance, that old-fashioned grace, they despised it. Weeping before God on account of sin, terror under a sense of God's wrath, or fear lest the sentence of his law should be executed, they never knew. They passed into the land of hope without going round by Weeping Cross, and every day I grow more and more suspicious of a man's religion if he has not gone round by that road. A man who was healed before he was wounded, clothed before he was stripped, filled before he was empty, made alive before he was slain, has good reason to suspect whether sovereign grace has ever laid its hand upon him. These people with the unbroken heart had gladsome hopes

and joyful confidences, but they all came to an end, as they will do in your case and mine if we are strangers to contrition. Ever be it remembered that, true as it is that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ shall be saved, it is equally true "Ye must be born again;" "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven;" "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit;" and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." It is only the birth of the spirit, the spiritual nature, that can enter into spiritual matters and become a possessor of truly spiritual joys. An unbroken heart is a fatal defect.

This led to a second fault, namely, *want of depth.* The stony-ground hearer was all surface; everything about him was superficial. The rock never having been broken there was no depth of earth to plough. So in many men who profess to be converted, there has been no real estimate of sin. "Yes, we are sinners," they say, "Oh, yes, yes, of course we are all sinners;" but to feel what it is to be a sinner is quite another thing. To be crushed down to the earth under a sense of having violated the thrice holy law of God, this many have never felt. And Jesus Christ—yes, he is a Saviour, and they will say they take him for a Saviour; but what it is to be saved, what it was he suffered, why he needed to suffer, what was the tremendous guilt that compelled such a sacrifice, they have never considered; in fact, they have never thought at all, and they do not mean to think. Bees descend into the flowers and suck out the honey, but butterflies alight on the lilies for a moment, and are away again, true emblems of flippant pretenders to grace. Many persons who profess to be Christians seem to have no acquaintance with the plague of their own hearts; they believe that there is something amiss within, but they do not know that their heart is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" consequently, though they admit they need divine grace, they do not know how much they need it. They would subscribe to the truth, "Without me ye can do nothing," but they do not know it experimentally. They are strangers to those failures and inward disappointments which lead a man to feel his nothingness. It is surface work; nothing is deep about them. When they became professors of the religion of Christ they never weighed the truth, or searched the Scriptures to see whether things are indeed so. They were Calvinists because the preacher was Calvinistic; they would have been Arminians quite as readily if the preacher had been Arminian; in fact, they would have been anything they were taught to be; they never judged, weighed, and considered for themselves. In espousing the truth as it is in Jesus they never calculated the difficulties of a religious life. It did not strike them that they would have to fight with sin without and sin within; they never looked at that mighty trinity, the world, the flesh, and the devil, with which they would have to wage a life-long combat. They took the sweets, and thought not of the bitter herbs. They were volatile, and are volatile still. They cannot think, neither can you persuade them to attempt it. This is a fault indeed.

And then there was a third defect: *the secret part of their religion was a failure.* The seed on the stony ground did not fail in the sprouting,

nor in the blade which appeared above; but it had no root. If you were to trace some professors home, you would find no secret prayer. Let that word go through this congregation, if there are any of you living in the neglect of secret prayer. No secret prayer, no secret reading of the Word of God, no chewing of it to get the essence and the juice out of it, no vital contact with Christ in private, no communion of the soul in secret with the living God! This is a deadly sign! They were at the public meeting; they were fussy enough upon committees; they could be first and foremost if there were any singing to be done, or if there were any preaching required; but oh, the secret prayer, the secret living with God, the soul-searching, the trying of the reins to see whether they were right or wrong—they had given this all up. Taking it for granted that they must be right because they have a sort of faith, they look upon every question as to their safety as so much unbelief, and the work of Satan, and so they wrap themselves up in their delusions. They think they must be the people of God because they profess themselves to be such, but they have never looked for the fruit which must be borne by every branch of the true vine.

And so, fourthly, there was another thing which I do not think you will find in Mark, but you will see it in one of the other evangelists—*they lacked moisture.* Now, a plant must have moisture. Dew, rain, or some sort of watering must come to it. On that little soil with a hard rock at the bottom there was plenty of heat when the sun shone, and so the little moisture it had made the seed sprout at once, but it had no further moisture, and therefore became parched. So certain hearers get a little moisture, as it were, by contact with an earnest preacher, they come under that word which drops as the dew and distils as the rain, but they have not the vitalizing Holy Ghost at their root to be the perpetual source of life. They have their lamps, but they have no oil in their vessels to keep them trimmed. They lack the moisture of the Holy Ghost. He it is that comes to his own people secretly, at the roots of their life, so that from him they suck up the life of God, and so they live: but the mere stony-ground convert has not the Holy Ghost. And oh, permit me to say most solemnly to every one here, if we have no more than nature gave us under its best conceivable circumstances, we have no more than the Pharisees, and that landed them in hell. We must have the Spirit of God, and from first to last the religion of our hearts must be wrought of the Spirit, and sustained by the Spirit, and if it be not, the sooner we are rid of such a religion the better, for it will only deceive us. I feel the necessity of preaching such a sermon as this, because I perceive church members going aside into open sin, and others turning aside to one or another of the new delusions of the present age, and there seems to be a new one every month. Some foolish people stand with their mouths open ready for any novelty to fly down their throats. They are as dry straw, only wanting some impostor to apply the spark to them, and yet they call themselves Christians. There are so many now-a-days who do not know what they believe, and so become the prey of Romanists, Ritualists, Atheists, or some other deceivers. There is a little plant in the garden, and a thief comes along and takes away root and all; he will not do so with

a well rooted oak, I warrant you: and if we were well rooted like the oak, we should believe what we do believe, and know what we do know; and should have principle to keep us steady. The old Nonconformists, might have been dragged to prison or to the stake without difficulty; but to get them to yield their nonconformity, or put aside their principles, was not possible; alas for the degenerate sons of such sturdy fathers. If what you believe be not true, fling it away; but if it be true, let your faces be like flints and your natures like iron against all the temptations of this wicked, ever-changing age, which flies this way and that, but always away from its God. Oh, when shall it be that those who know the Lord shall stand fast, and having done all, shall still stand!

III. Thirdly, I must close by trying to teach THE LESSON OF THE TEXT. That lesson is four-fold. It says to each one of us, *be deeply in earnest.* Do not play at religion. Do not think of a religious profession as a garb which you can put on and take off. Pray God to make sure work in your soul, sure work for eternity. You have to die, you have to face the judgment seat; have a religion that will bear those ordeals. Pray to have such a work of the Spirit in your soul that neither death nor judgment can alarm you. Cry to God that repentance may be cut deep into you, making lasting marks in you, that your faith may be no sham faith, but a giving up of your soul entirely into the hands of Christ; that your love to Christ may be no rhapsody, but a matter of real heart-affection; that your religious walk may not be for other people to see, but be a walk before God; that all your actions may be the result of principle, and that you may not be swayed by company, but rather may sway company, and may have a vital force within yourself of God's implanting, that will bear you on in the straight road, whichever way others may take. I say again, Be awfully in earnest about everything that concerns religion, and pray God to forgive you if in any measure you have been flippant concerning it.

Secondly, *watch the effect of your own daily trials.* See how they affect you. If a boat is ready to sink in the Thames, it ought never to be trusted at sea. If your religion already begins to fail you, what will it do by-and-by? You were laughed at, and you were half inclined to give it all up: what would you do if you were more sternly persecuted? You have already been willing to go back, your heart has faltered: what will you do if fiercer temptations assail you? You have already been terribly put to it by the arguments of a fool: what would you do if some of the deep thinkers were to argue with you? "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horsemen? And if, in the land of peace wherein thou hast trusted, they have wearied thee, what wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?" I do not object to your

growing slowly if you grow surely. If my house takes a long time in building, I would rather give the builder his time than tell him to run it up in a week or two, and make it so frail that the first wind would blow it away like cardboard. You have to live in this house eternally, pray God to build it surely. As to building fast, that little matters. O you that can hardly go a step towards heaven without question and dispute, I do not so much tremble concerning you, as about some who never have any question or doubt, because they have never any thought at all, but pass it all by with a heedless carelessness, taking things for granted. See, then, how you stand in your present trials. You have grown richer; do you love the Lord as much as you did? You transact more business; can you still keep the world out of your heart? You have received more praise of late; can you still cling to Christ as you used to do when you had but few friends? You have been in health lately; have you lived as near to God as when you were ill? Or you have come down in the world and are numbered with the poor; do you love the Lord as much as you did when he enriched you? You have lately heard the remarks of a cunning hater of the gospel; were you able to feel that, though you could not answer him in words, yet your heart answered him, and threw off his falsehood as the roof throws off the rain? If not, look to it. If your vessel is ready to go down in smooth water, what will she do in a storm? If you cannot keep the water out of her now, what will you do when the hurricane overtakes her? It will be all over with you then, I fear.

Another lesson is, *constantly examine yourself.* A great many persons get into the Bankruptcy Court, but as far as I recollect never one came there through too much attendance to his business. I never heard of a farmer losing his crop through being too diligent in husbandry; and of all the souls that are lost not one has perished through being too much in earnest as to self-examination. Dear brethren, choose a faithful, testing ministry. Do not look after a smooth-tongued preacher who will always cry, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people." You want comfort, and should have it, but you want searching as well, and you must have it. Do pray that you may be faithfully dealt with, that there may be no glozing over matters, no filming of wounds, but that there may be honest dealings between you and the minister, and between you and your God. God grant that we may be willing to be searched, for when we are unwilling to be searched we may reckon it quite certain that there is something amiss with us. When we cry, "I am afraid I am a hypocrite," there is very little fear of it; but presumption is fatal.

Now, lastly, let all this show us *how necessary it is that we cast all the stress and burden of our salvation entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ,* because wherever a man does that, there is honest and good ground

in his soul, and the seed has sprung up aright. Whenever a man can truly say, "I rest alone in Jesus;

> 'Nothing in my hand I bring:
> Simply to thy cross I cling,'"

that is the great secret of a true hope. Jesus lived and died for us: and if we do entirely and alone depend upon him it is well with our souls.

It is well to live continually at the foot of the cross, looking up to Jesus, finding all our hope in him, and none in ourselves. Beloved, it is the work of the Spirit of God to bring us there and keep us there. If we search ourselves in the light of the cross we shall be willing to judge ourselves that we be not judged; in the presence of those dear wounds from whence distils the atoning blood, we shall cry, "Try my reins and my heart." But if any man say, "I believe in Jesus, therefore I will not search: I trust in Jesus, therefore I will live as I like," that man's religion is vain; he has profaned the cross by his reckless reasoning, and let him take heed how God shall judge him, for of all judgments surely that will be the heaviest which shall come upon the man who dared to take the doctrine of the cross as a reason for careless living, and made the mercy and the cleansing power of the Redeemer himself an apology for walking heedlessly before God, and continuing in vain presumption. God grant us grace to receive the seed into good ground, for Jesus sake.

The Parable of the Sower

"And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: a sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—Luke viii. 4—8.

In our country when a sower goes forth with his seed, he enters into an enclosed field, and begins at once with due order and precision to scatter the seed from his basket along every ridge and furrow; but in the East, the corn-growing country, hard by a small town, is one vast unenclosed plain. True, it is divided into different properties, but there are no hedges, no divisions, except the ancient landmark, or perhaps on rare occasions, a simple ridge of stones to divide one man's field from another. Through these wide open common lands there are footpaths, the most frequented being called the highways. You must not imagine these highways to be in the slightest degree like our macadamized roads, but simply frequented paths, which are trodden tolerably hard. Here and there, there are bye-ways, along which travellers who wish to avoid the public road may journey with a little more safety when the main road is infested with robbers, and the hasty pedestrian can strike out a short cut for himself across the plain, and so open a fresh road for others who are journeying in the same direction. When the sower goes out in the morning to sow his seed, he finds, perhaps, a little spot of ground scratched over with the primitive Eastern plough; he begins to scatter his seed there of course most plentifully, but there runs a path right through the very centre of his field, and unless he is willing to leave a broad headland, he must throw a handful on the pathway; and yonder, there is a rock cropping out just in the midst of the ploughed land, and the seed falls on that; and there too, fostered by the negligent husbandry of the East, there is a corner full of the roots of nettles and thistles, and the sower sows his seed there too; the corn and the nettles come up together, and as we know by the parable, the thorns being the strongest spring up and choke the seed, so that it bringeth forth no fruit unto perfection. The recollection that the Bible was written in the East, and that its metaphors and allusions are fully to be explained to us only by Eastern travellers, would very often help us to understand a passage far better than the common English reader possibly can do.

Now the preacher of the gospel is like the sower. He does not make his seed; the seed is given him by his Master. It would not be possible for a man to make the smallest seed that ever germinated upon the earth, much less that celestial seed of eternal life. The minister goes to his Master in secret, and asks him to teach him his truth, and thus he fills his basket with the good seed of the kingdom. What the minister has to do, is to go forth in his Master's name and scatter precious truth. If he knew where the best soil was to be found, perhaps he might limit himself to that which had been prepared by the plough of conviction. But not knowing men's hearts, it is his business to preach the gospel to every creature—to throw a handful on that hard heart yonder, and another handful on that overgrown heart, which is full of cares and riches and pleasures of this world. He has to leave the fate of the seed in the care of the Master who gave it to him, for well he understands that he is not responsible for the harvest, he is only responsible for the care, the fidelity, and the integrity with which he scatters the seed, right and left with both his hands. What, if not a single ear should ever make glad the sheaves; if never should there be seen a single green blade starting up among the furrows, the man would be accepted and rewarded by his Master, if he had but sown the right seed, and sown it with careful hand. Alas! alas!—if it

were not for this fact—that we are not responsible for our success—with what despairing agony must we remember, that too often we labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought. The cry of Esaias of old. must be our cry still, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" But one seed in four finds hopeful soil. The three portions out of the four scattered on evil places, produce no good effect, but they are lost, and shall ne'er be seen again, except when they shall rise up in judgment against our ungracious hearers to condemn them Here let me remark, that the measure of our duty is not limited by the character of our hearers, but by the command of God. We are bound to preach the gospel, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear. Let men's hearts be what they may, I am not loosed from my obligation to sow the seed on the rock as well as in the furrow, on the highway as well as in the ploughed field.

My plan this morning will be very simply to address myself to the four classes of hearers that are to be found in my congregation. We have, first of all, those who are represented by the *way-side*, the *mere* hearers; then those represented by the *stony-ground hearers*, those in whom there is a transient impression produced, so transient, however, that it never comes to any lasting good. Then, those on whom *a large and good impression is produced*, but the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this world choke the seed; and, lastly, that small class—God be pleased to multiply it exceedingly—that small class of *good-ground hearers*, in whom the Word brings forth fruit, in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some a hundred fold.

I. First of all, then, I am to address myself to those hearts which are like the WAYSIDE—"Some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it." There are many of you who did not come here this morning to get a blessing. You did not intend to worship God, or to be affected by anything that you might hear. You are like the highway which was never intended to be a corn field. If a single grain of truth should fall into your heart and grow it would be a miracle, as great a wonder as for the corn to grow upon the hardly-trodden wayside. You are the wayside hearer. If the corn, however, shall be dexterously scattered, some of it will fall upon you and rest for a while upon your thoughts. 'Tis true you will not understand it. but nevertheless if it be placed before you in an interesting style, it will lodge for a little season. Until some more congenial entertainment shall attract you, you will talk of the words which you heard from the minister of truth. But even this slender benefit is brief, for in a very little season you will forget what manner of man you are. Would to God I could hope that my words would tarry with you, but we cannot hope it, for the soil of your heart is so well beaten by continual traffic, that there is no hope of the seed finding a lasting and living roothold down its roots. There is too much traffic in your soul to let the good seed remain uncrushed. The foot of Satan is always passing over your heart, with his herd of blasphemies, lusts, lies, and vanities. Then the chariots of pride roll along it, and the feet of greedy mammon tread it till it is hard as adamant. Alas! for the good seed, it finds not a moment's respite; crowds pass and repass; in fact, your soul is an Exchange, across which continually pass the busy feet of the merchants, that make merchandise with the souls of men. You are buying and selling, but you little think that you are selling the truth, and that you are buying your soul's destruction; you are busy here and there about this body, the husk of your manhood, but you are negligent of that internal, precious thing, your soul. You have no time, you say, to think of religion. No, the road of your heart is such a crowded thoroughfare, that there is no room for this wheat to spring up. If it did begin to germinate, some rough foot would crush the green blade ere it could come to anything like perfection. There have been times with you when the seed has lain long enough to begin to germinate, but just then there was some place of amusement open, and you entered there, and as with an iron heel, the spark of life that was in the seed was crushed out; it had fallen in the wrong place; there was too much traffic there for it possibly to grow. During the plague of London, when men were carried to their long home by multitudes, the grass grew in the streets; but corn could not grow in Cornhill, however excellent might be the seed which you should sow there. Ransack the world, and you cannot purchase a wheat that would flourish where such traffic continually rolls along. Your heart is just like that crowded thoroughfare; for there are so many thoughts, and cares, and sins, so many proud, vain, evil, rebellious thoughts against God, continually trafficking through it; that the truth is like seed cast on the highway; it cannot grow, it is crushed down; and if it does remain a moment, the birds of the air come and steal it away. Ay, but it is a very sad thought, that if you should scatter seed on the highway, it is not only the foot of a bad man that would prevent its growing, but the foot even of a saint would help to destroy its life. Alas!

men's hearts may be hardened, not merely by sin, but by the very preaching of the gospel. There is such a thing as being gospel-hardened; it is possible to sit under sermons till your heart becomes dead, and callous, and careless. Like the blacksmith's dog, that lies and sleeps while the sparks are flying about his nostrils, so you will lie and sleep under the hammer of the law, while the sparks of damnation are flying about you, never startled, never astonished. You have heard all that before; we tell you but a thrice-told tale when we warn you of the wrath to come. The men that work in the huge boilers in the Southwark manufactories, when they are first put inside to hold the hammer, their ears are stunned, they cannot hear a sound; but by degrees, I am told, they are so used to that hideous noise, that they could sleep in the midst of the engine while men were battering it and beating it, although the reverberations are like the loudest thunder. So has it become with you; minister after minister has trodden along the highway of your soul, till it has become so hard, that unless God himself shall be pleased to crack it in sunder with an earthquake, or with an heartquake, there will never be room for the seed of heaven to lodge there. Your soul has become like a hard, well-beaten path, that hath much traffic on it.

We have marked this hard road-side, let us now describe what becomes of the good word, when it falls upon his heart. It does not grow, it would have grown if it had fallen on right soil, but it is in the wrong place, and it remains as dry as when it fell from the sower's hand. Its life lies asleep, the life-germ in the gospel hides itself, and it lies upon the surface of the heart, but never enters into it. Like the snow, which sometimes falls upon our streets and does not lie there for an instant, but drops upon the wet pavement and is dissolved and gone, so is it with this man. The word has not time to quicken in the souls of such casual hearers of it. It lies there an instant, but it never begins to strike its root, or to take the slightest effect.

But, we say, why do men come to hear if the word is never made useful to them, and never enters the heart? That has often puzzled me; there are some of our hearers who would not be absent on the Sunday for all the world, and who seem to be quite delighted to come up with us to worship, but yet the tear never trickles down their cheek, their soul never seems mounting up to heaven on the wings of praise, nor do they truly join in our confessions of sin. When do they ever think about the wrath to come, or the future state of their souls? Their heart is iron; the minister might as well preach to a heap of stones as preach to them. What brings these senseless sinners here? Shall we talk to brows of brass and hearts of steel? Surely we are as hopeful of converting lions and leopards as these untamed, unmoved hearts. Oh feeling! thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason. I suppose these men often come because it is respectable, and again, because it even helps to make them hard; if they stopped away conscience would prick them, there would be a little life in them, but they go that they may be able to flatter themselves with the notion that they are doing right after all. They are not irreligious, not they; they are not regardless of God's house and of his servant; they come, that they may get hardened, and may be more and more stultified in their state of sin and insensibility. Oh! my hearers, your case is one that might make an angel weep; to have the sun of the gospel shining on your faces, and yet to have blind eyes that never see the light. The music of heaven sounds sweetly, but your ears are deaf, and the faintest accent never reaches your poor spirit; the minister is to you as one who plays upon a goodly instrument, but he plays before a statue that has no ears to hear. You can catch the turn of a phrase, you can find out the meaning of a metaphor, but the hidden meaning, the divine life, is all lost upon you. You are sitting down at the marriage feast, but you eat not of the dainties, you drink not of those wines; you hear the bells of heaven sounding joy over ransomed spirits, but you yourself live unransomed, without God, and without Christ. You are standing at the gate of the narrow way, at the very gate, but yet you do not enter it; you are close to the house of mercy, and the door is on the jar; you stand, and sometimes look within, but never take the final and decisive step. Let us do what we may to urge you, let us plead with you and pray for you, and weep over you, you still remain just as hardened, as careless, and as thoughtless as ever you were. Oh! may God have mercy on you, and bring you out of this evil state, that you may yet be saved. O Holy Spirit, break up this hard highway, and cause it yet to bring forth abundantly.

We have not, however, completed the picture. The passage tells us, that the fowls of the air devoured it. Is there a man here, this morning, who is one of these wayside hearers? Perhaps he did not mean to come in, but he saw a great crowd standing in the Strand, and he thought he would even turn in and spend the hour, and he will hear something, perhaps, which he will not readily forget; but when he shall get outside and go home, some old companion will propose to him that they should go

on some excursion this afternoon. He agrees, and that poor seed which fell on such an unpropitious spot, will be devoured by the fowls of the air. There are plenty of evil ones ready always to eat up this good seed. There is the devil himself, that prince of the air, ready at any time to snatch away a good thought, or quench a holy resolution. And then, the devil is not alone—he hath legions of helpers. He may set a man's own wife, a man's own children, he may set that shop of yours upon you, and it may eat up the good seed. There may be a customer waiting at the door, and though you have no wish to serve him to-day, yet you may be afraid of losing him, and you may do it, and then the good seed is gone, and all its good effect is carried away. Oh, sorrow upon sorrow, that heavenly seed should become devil's meat; that God's corn should feed the devil's birds.

Let me turn personally to you again, this morning. O my hearers, if you have heard the gospel from your youth, what waggon-loads of sermons have been wasted on you! In your younger days, you heard old Dr. So and-so, and how that dear old man was wont to pray for his hearers till his eyes seemed red with tears! Do you recollect those many Sundays when you said to yourself, "Let me go to my chamber and fall on my knees and pray?" But you did not; the fowls of the air ate up the seed, and you went on to sin just as you had sinned. Since then, by some strange impulse, you are very rarely absent from God's house; but now the sparks of the gospel fall into your soul as if they dropped into an ocean, in which they are quenched for ever. The law may be thundered at you, you do not sneer at it, but it never affects you. Jesus Christ may be lifted up; his dear wounds may be exhibited; the streaming blood may flow before your very eyes, and you may be bidden with all earnestness to look to him and live; but it has now become a matter of perfect indifference to you. You have not said so much in words, "If I am to be lost, I shall be lost, and if I am to be saved, I shall be saved;" you have not *said* so much, but you have come to *think* so, and now we may do what we will with you, and what we will for you, your flinty spirits we cannot penetrate, and into your hard heart we cannot thrust a holy thought. What shall I do for you? Shall I stand here, and rain tears upon this hard highway? Alas! my tears will not break it; it is far too hard for that. Shall I bring the gospel-plough upon it? Alas! it will break the steel; but the share will not enter. What shall we do? O God, thou knowest how to dash the flint in pieces. Thou canst melt the stony long-travelled heart with the precious blood of Jesus. Do it now, we beseech thee, to the praise and glory of thy grace, that the good seed may yet live, and yet produce that heavenly harvest, after which the soul of thy servant yearns, without which he cannot live, but with which he can rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

II. I shall now turn to the second class of hearers. "And some fell upon a ROCK, and as soon as it was sprung up it withered away, because it lacked moisture." You can easily picture to yourselves that piece of rock cropping out in the midst of the field. By some disruption of nature, it has been heaped upwards into the midst of the plain, and of course the seed falls there as it does everywhere else. We have hearers who cause us more pleasure and yet more subsequent pain than many of you would believe. None but those who love the souls of men can tell what hopes, what joy, and what bitter dashings of our expectations to the ground these stony places have caused us. We have a class of hearers whose hearts inwardly are very hard, but outwardly they are apparently the softest and most impressable of men. While other men see nothing in the sermon, these men weep. It is but an ordinary discourse to the most of our hearers, but these men are affected to tears. Whether you preach the terrors of the law or the love of Calvary, they are alike stirred in their souls, and the liveliest impressions are apparently produced. I have some such here this morning. They have resolved, re-resolved, and yet have procrastinated. They are not the sturdy enemies of God who clothe themselves in steel, but they seem to bare their breasts, and lay them open, and say to the minister, "Cut here; here is a naked breast for you. Here aim your arrows. They shall find a ready lodging place." Rejoiced in heart, we shoot our arrows there, and they appear to penetrate; but, alas, there is a secret armour worn underneath the flesh which blunts every dart, and though it abides awhile, it falls away, and no work is done. We read of this character under this language—"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth." Or as another passage explains it: "And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." Oh! have we not tens of thousands of our hearers who receive the word with joy? They have no deep convictions, it is true, no terrible alarms, but they leap into Christ on a sudden, and profess an instantaneous faith in him, and that faith too has all the appearance of being genuine. When we look at it, the seed has really sprouted. There is

a kind of life in it, there is the real green blade. We thank God, and bow our knees, and clap our hands—there is a sinner brought back we say, there is a soul born to God, there is an heir of heaven. But our joy is premature—they sprang up on a sudden, and received the word with joy, because they had no depth of earth, and from that very cause which hastened their reception of the seed they also by-and-bye when the sun is risen with his fervent heat, withered away. These men we see every day in the week. They often come to join the Church; they tell us a story of how they heard us preach on such-and-such an occasion, and oh the word was so blessed to them, they never felt so happy in their lives! "Oh sir, I thought I must leap from my seat when I heard about a precious Christ, and I believed on him there and then; I am sure I did." We ask them whether they ever felt their need of a Saviour. They say "Yes," but they mean "No." We question them as to whether they were ever convinced of sin. Well they think they were, but they don't know; but one thing they know, they feel a great pleasure in religion. We put it to them, "Do you think you will hold on?" Oh, they are confident they shall. They could not go back to their old acquaintance, they are quite sure of it. They hate the things they once loved, they are sure they do. Everything has become new to them. And all this is on a sudden. We enquire when the good work began. We find it began when it ended, that is to say, there was no previous work, no ploughing of the soil, but on a sudden they sprang from death to life and out of condemnation into grace, as a man standing on the edge of a river might leap into the flood. Still we are very thankful for these men. We cannot deny that there seems to be every appearance of grace. Perhaps we receive them into the Church; but in a week or two they are not so regular as they used to be at a place of worship. We gently reprove them, and they say, well, they meet with such opposition in religion, that they are content to yield a little. Another week and we lose them altogether. The reason is that they have been laughed at, exposed to a little opposition, and they have gone back. They are the Mr. Pliables; they will go to heaven with Christian, for heaven is a brave country. So they walk arm in arm, chatting so sweetly together about the world to come. But by-and-bye there is a bog—the Slough of Despond—and in goes poor Christian, and Mr. Pliable falls in too. "Oh!" says he, "I did not bargain for this; I did not bargain to have my mouth filled with dirt; if I can once get out, and get back, you may have the brave country all to yourself for me." So the poor man flounders out as best he can, and lands on the same side as his own house; and back he goes, so glad to think he has escaped from the melancholy necessity of being a Christian. And what think you are the feelings of the minister? He feels that he had reckoned too early upon his success. He is like the husbandman, who sees his field all green and flourishing, and at night a frost nips every shoot, and the poor farmer mourns because his hoped-for gains are gone. So does the minister; he goes to his chamber, and casts himself on his face before God, and cries, "Oh, I have been deceived; this man hath returned like the dog to his vomit; like the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." You will remember that ancient picture of Orpheus, who had such skill upon the lyre, that the ancients said he made the very oaks and stones dance around him. It is a poetical fiction, and yet hath it sometimes happened to the minister, that not only have the godly rejoiced, but the very oaks and stones have danced from their places; but alas! they have been oaks and stones still. Hushed is the lyre, and the oak returns to its rooting place, and the stone casts itself once more heavily to the earth. The sinner, who, like Saul, was among the prophets, goes back to plan mischief against the Lord Most High. He who sung yesterday, and prayed the day before in the public assembly, goes to the tavern to curse; he rolls through the streets on the Sabbath night which follows his reception into the Church visible on earth. I had one man who caused me many bitter tears. In a certain village he was the ringleader of all that was bad; he was a tall, fine, big fellow, and a man that could drink more largely than, perhaps, any man for miles around him. He was the terror of the neighbourhood,—a man who would curse and swear, and never knew a thought of fear. He stepped in one day to hear the Word of God, and he wept. All the parish was astonished. There was old So-and-so weeping, and it was rumoured about that Tom felt impressed; he began regularly to attend the chapel, and was manifestly an altered man. The public-house lost an excellent customer; he was not seen in the skittle alley, nor was he detected in the drunken rows that were so common in the neighbourhood. At last he ventured to come forward at the prayer-meeting; he talked about what he had experienced, what he had felt and known. I heard him pray; it was rough, rugged language, but there was such impassioned earnestness. I set him down as being a bright jewel in the Redeemer's crown. He held out six, nay, nine months he persevered in our midst. If there was rough work to be done, he would do it; if there was a Sunday-school to be maintained six or

seven miles away, he would walk there At any risk, he would be out to help in the Lord's work; if he could but be of service to the meanest member of the Church of Christ, he rejoiced greatly. So he went on; but at last, the laughter to which he was exposed, the jeers and scoffs of his old companions,—though at first he bore them like a man,—became too much for him. He began to think he had been a little too fanatical, a little too earnest. He slunk up to the place of worship instead of coming boldly in; he gradually forsook week-night service, and forsook the Sabbath day at last; and though often warned, and often rebuked, he returned to his old habits, and though never again such a monster in sin as he had been before, yet any thoughts of God or godliness that he had ever known, seemed to die away. He could again take the blasphemer's oath; once more could he act wickedly with the profane; and he—of whom we had often boasted, and said in our meetings together, "Oh! how much is God to be glorified by this! what cannot grace do?"—to the confusion of us all, was to be seen sometimes drunk in our streets, and then it was thrown in our teeth, "This is one of your Christians, is it?—one of your converts gone back again, and become as bad as he was before?"

If it is bad to be like the wayside hearer, I cannot think it is much better to be like the rock. And yet this second class of hearers certainly give us more joy than the first. There is a sort of people who always come round a new minister; and I have often thought it is an act of God's kindness in Providence that he always sends some of these people at first, while the minister is young, and has but few to stand by him—a class of people who are easily moved, and if he preaches earnestly they feel it, and they love him, and they gather round him. But time, that proves all things, proves them. They seemed to be made of good and true metal, but they are put in the fire, they are tested, they are proved, they are consumed in the furnace. I see as I look here some one or two of that kind. I do not know the most of you, but I do see some of whom I must say, "Ye are the very persons here described." I have looked at you when I have been preaching, and often have I thought, "There, that man one of these days will come out from the world, I am sure he will." I have thanked God for him. Ah! but these seven years have we preached to you and you are the same as you were. Well, there may be seven years more, who can tell? and are those to be seven years of wasted efforts? are those to be seven years of warnings rejected and of invitations refused? Can it be so, and must you be carried to your tomb at last, and shall I stand over the mouth of that open sepulchre, and think, "Here lies a blasted hope, a flower that withered in its bud, a man in whom grace seemed to struggle, but in whom it never reigned, who gave some hopeful spasms of life, and then they all subsided into the coldness and languor of eternal death?" God save you! Oh! may he deal with you effectually, and may you, even you, yet be brought in, that Jesus may have all the glory.

III. I shall have very briefly to treat of the third class, and may the Spirit of God assist me to deal faithfully with you. "And some fell among THORNS, and the thorns sprung up and choked it." Now this was good soil. The two first characters were bad; the wayside was not the proper place, the rock was not a congenial situation for the growth of any plant, but this is good soil, for it grows thorns. A soil that will grow thistles, will surely grow wheat. Wherever the thistle will spring up and flourish, there would wheat flourish too. This was right rich, fat, fertile soil; it was no marvel therefore that the husbandman dealt largely there, and threw handful after handful upon that corner of the field. See how happy he is when in a month or two's time he visits the spot. The seed has sprung up. True, there's a suspicious little plant down there of about the same size as the wheat. "Oh!" he thinks, "that's not much, the corn will outgrow that; when it comes up it will choke these few thistles that have unfortunately mixed with it." Ay, Mr. Husbandman, thou dost not understand the force of evil, or thou wouldst not thus dream! He comes again, and the seed has grown, there is even the corn in the ear, but the thistles, the thorns, and the briars have become intertwisted with one another, and the poor wheat can hardly get a ray of sunshine. It is so festooned with brambles every way, that what with the drippings from the brambles and the absence of sunlight, it looks of a yellow and sallow hue. Still it lives; it perseveres in growing, and it does seem as if it would bring forth a little fruit, but it never comes to anything. With it the reaper never fills his arm. There is the sign of fruit, but there is no reality in it, it brings forth no fruit unto perfection.

Now we have this class very largely among us. We have the gentlemen and ladies who come up to hear the word, and they understand what they hear too. They are not ignorant and unenlightened men and women, who cast away what they have heard. We are not throwing pearls before swine when we preach to them, but they recollect

and treasure up the words of truth; they take them home; they think them over; they come, they come, they come again. They even go the length of making a profession of religion. The wheat seems to bud, and bloom and blossom, it will soon come to perfection. Be in no hurry, these men and women have a great deal to see after; they have the cares of a large concern; their establishment employs so many hundred hands; do not be deceived about their godliness—they have no time for it. They will tell you that they must live; that they cannot neglect this world; that they must anyhow look out for the present, and as for the future, they think they will be able to take care of that by-and-bye. They continue to attend, and that poor little dwindled blade keeps on growing; and now they have got rich, they can come up to the place of worship in their carriage, they have all that heart can wish now. Ah! now the seed will grow, will it not? No, no. They have no cares now; the shop is given up, they live in the country; they have not to ask, "Where shall the money come from to meet the next bill;" or "how they shall be able to provide for an increasing family." No, now they have too much instead of too little, for they have their *riches*. "Well but," says one, "they might spend their riches for God; they might be talents that they could put out at interest." Oh! no, it is not that; their riches are deceitful. Now they have to entertain much company, now they must be respectable, now they must think about becoming members of parliament, now they must have all the deceitfulness which riches can possibly confer. Yes, but they begin to spend their riches, so they have surely got over that difficulty. They give largely to the cause of Christ, they are munificent in the cause of charity, and the like; now that little blade will grow, will it not? No, for now behold the thorns of pleasure. Their liberality to others involves liberality to themselves; they take pleasure in what they have, and quite right they should too; but at the same time these pleasures become so tall and so big that they choke the wheat, and the good grains of gospel truth cannot grow because they have this pleasure, that musical party, that ball and that soiree; so they cannot attend to the things of God, because the pleasures of this world choke the seed. I know several fearful specimens of this class. It were not fair to tell the story if it should be known again, but I might tell of scores. I know one who stands high in court circles, who has often confessed to me that he wishes he were poor, for he thinks that then he might enter the kingdom of heaven. He holds a high position, but he has said it—and said it too with marks upon his countenance which showed that he meant what he said—"Ah! sir, these politics, these politics, I wish I were rid of them, they are eating the life out of my heart; I cannot serve God as I would. I only wish I could retire to some sequestered place to seek my Saviour." I know of one, too, overloaded perhaps with riches, always kind and noble with them too; that man has said to me—when we have walked together and I have read his very thoughts—"Ah! sir, it is an awful thing to be rich, for one cannot find it easy to keep to the Saviour with all this earth about me."

Ah! my dear hearers, I will not ask for you that God may lay you on a bed of sickness, that he may strip you of all your wealth, that he may bring you to beggary, that he may take away your comforts; I will not ask that; but oh, if he were to do it, and you were to save your soul, it would be the greatest bargain you could ever make. If the king could doff his diadem to be saved; if those mightiest among the mighty who now make this complaint, that the thorns choke the seed, could give up all their riches and be banished from all their pleasures; if all their luxury should be turned into poverty, and if they that fare sumptuously every day could take the place of Lazarus on the dunghill, and have dogs to lick their sores, it were a happy change for them if their souls might be but saved. Mind you, I do not believe but what a man may be honourable and rich, and have much pleasure in the mercies of God, and then go to heaven hereafter; but it will be hard work with him: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." Some of those camels do go through the needle's eye; God does make some rich men enter the kingdom of heaven, but hard is their struggle, and desperate is the strife they always have against their proud flesh, to keep it under and subdue it. Steady, young man, steady! hurry not to get up there. It is a place where thy head will turn. Do not ask God to make thee popular; they that have popularity hate it, and would be rid of it. Do not ask that he would make thee famous and rich; they that are famous and rich often look within, and wish that they could go back to the quietude they once enjoyed. Cry with Agur—"Give me neither poverty nor riches." God give me to tread the golden mean, and may I ever have in my heart that good seed, which shall bring forth fruit a hundredfold to his own glory.

IV. I now close with the last character, namely the GOOD GROUND. Of the good soil as you will, mark, we have but one in four. Ah! would to God there were one

in four of us here, with well-prepared hearts to receive the Word. The ground was good; not that it was good by nature, but it had been made good by grace. God had ploughed it; he had stirred it up with the plough of conviction, and there it lay in ridge and furrow as it should be. And when the Gospel was preached, the heart received it, for the man said, "That's just the Christ I want. Mercy!" said he, "it's just what a needy sinner requires. A refuge! God help me to fly to it, for a refuge I sorely want." So that the preaching of the gospel was THE thing to give comfort to this disturbed and ploughed soil. Down fell the seed; it sprung up. In some cases it produced a fervency of love, a largeness of heart, a devotedness of purpose. like seed which produced a hundredfold. The man became a mighty servant for God, he spent himself and was spent. He took his place in the vanguard of Christ's army, stood in the hottest of the battle, and did deeds of daring which few could accomplish,—the seed produced a hundredfold. It fell in another heart of like character;—the man could not do the most, still he did much. He gave himself, just as he was, up to God, and in his business he had a word to say for the business of the world to come. In his daily walk, he quietly adorned the doctrine of God his Saviour,—he brought forth sixtyfold. Then it fell on another, whose abilities and talents were but small; he could not be a star, but he would be a glow-worm; he could not do as the greatest, but he was content to do something, even though it were the least. The seed had brought forth in him tenfold, perhaps twentyfold. How many have I of such in this vast congregation to-day? I came here with my soul all on fire to preach to you; but a sudden darkness and heaviness of soul has possessed me, and while I have been addressing you, I have preached in my own spirit against wind and tide. But may I hope tbat notwithstanding the awkwardness with which I throw the seed it may light on some good spot, some happy soil? Is there one who prays within himself, "O Lord save me; God be merciful to me a sinner?" The seed has fallen in the right spot. Soul, thy prayer shall be heard; God never sets a man longing for mercy without intending to give it. And does another whisper, "Oh! that I might be saved?" Soul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou, even thou, shalt be saved." Hast thou been the chief of sinners? Trust Christ, and thy enormous sins shall vanish as the millstone sinks beneath the flood. Is there no man here that will now trust the Saviour? Can it be possible that the Spirit is entirely absent? that he is not moving in one soul? not begetting life in one spirit? We will pray that now he may descend, that scattered badly as the seed may be, the protecting God may watch over it, and foster and nourish it, till it shall come to an eternal harvest.

What a solemn thought it is—to think of these great Sunday gatherings these many years, coming and going, coming and going, and so many yet unsaved! I suppose it is my lot to address more than one or two millions every year of precious immortal spirits, and how many out of these millions hear with deaf ears, are not moved in their souls, but continue as they were, dead in trespasses and in sins! The thought sometimes staggers me—shall these congregations pass before my eyes in eternity, and if I have been unfaithful, shall I be spit upon by every mouth of every man whom I have deceived? Shall every eye of the millions I have addressed flash fiery damnations on me throughout eternity? They must, *they must*, if I have not sought your welfare, and if I have not preached to you the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I implore you, I beseech of you, if your blood must fall somewhere, at least take heed to what I say now, or permit me to hope that you will accept me as having tried to be faithful to you, lest your blood be found on my skirts. But why should that blood be scattered anywhere? Is there not hope? Is there not salvation? Is there not, while life lasts, still an open door of escape? Flee, flee, my hearer, flee! I beseech thee flee, I implore thee by the living God, by time, by eternity, by heaven, by hell, flee, flee to Jesus, ere Death o'ertakes thee, for he is after thee—that skeleton rider on his pale horse, and ere damnation reaches thee flee, flee to him whose opened arms are ready to receive thee now. Trust Jesus and thou art saved: "He that believeth on the Lord Jesus, and is baptized, shall be saved, he that believeth not must be damned." Am I fanatical or enthusiastic in begging, in beseeching you to think of these things? "Fanatic," at the day of judgment, will only mean a man who was in earnest. An "Enthusiast," will only mean one who meant what he said. Oh, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, lest now, even while you are here, God's wrath should burn, and his swift justice overtake you:—

"Come, guilty souls, and flee away,
To Christ, and heal your wounds;
This is the welcome gospel-day,
Wherein free grace abounds."

Satan's Punctuality, Power, and Purpose

"Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved "—Luke viii. 12.

IT is a great comfort that such multitudes are willing to hear the word of God. Even though many should turn out to be as the rock, the wayside, or the thorny ground, still it is a cheering circumstance that the seed can be sown broadcast over so large an acreage. Yet the thoughts excited by the sight of a vast congregation are not all pleasurable; the question most naturally arises—What will come of all this preaching and hearing? Will the heavenly seed produce a harvest or fall on barren soil? The thoughtful Christian, in considering this question, takes into consideration the condition of the persons addressed, and remembers that many are unprepared for the gospel. So far from being like a field furrowed to receive the seed, they are like a trodden pathway. They hear the gospel, and so far we are hopeful of them, but they have no idea of allowing it to enter their inmost souls. The ground of their hearts is too much occupied already, other feet will tread there and speedily obliterate the sower's footprints, and as for the good seed, it may lie where it falls, entrance into the inner man it can have none. Nor is this all, the anxious observer remembers that there is yet another difficulty: the arch-enemy of God and man is opposed to the salvation of souls, and therefore he is present with destructive power wherever the seed of the Word is being sown. It is of this we shall now speak,—the activity of Satan during the preaching of the gospel. He is out of sight, but we may not allow him to be out of mind: he does all the more mischief if men sleep; let us watchfully turn our eyes towards him, and prove that we are not ignorant of his devices.

Our divine Lord in the words before us reminded his hearers *of the devil's punctuality*,—"*then* cometh the devil"; *of his power*,—"and taketh away the word out of their hearts"; *and of his purpose*, which is the prevention of saving faith,—"lest they should believe and be saved." At this time, when special services are being held, it may be well to bring these points clearly forward that all may be warned against the wicked one, and so by the grace of God his designs may be frustrated.

I. First observe the evil one's PUNCTUALITY. No sooner does the seed fall than the fowls devour it. Our text says "*then*," that is, *there and then*, "cometh the devil." Mark renders it, "Satan cometh immediately." Whoever else may loiter, Satan never does. No sooner does a

camel fall dead in the wilderness than the vultures appear. Not a bird was visible, nor did it seem possible that there could be one within a radius of many miles, yet speedily there are specks in the sky, and soon the devourers are gorging themselves with flesh: even thus do the spirits of evil scent their prey from afar, and hasten to their destroying work. The lapse of time might give opportunity for thought, and thought might lead to repentance, and therefore the enemy hurries to prevent the hearer from considering the truth he has heard. When the gospel has somewhat affected the hearers, so that in some slight degree it is in their hearts, *then* swifter than the flight of the eagle is the haste of the devil to take the word out of their hearts. A little delay might put the case beyond Satanic power, hence the promptitude of diabolic activity. O that we were half as quick and active in the service of our Lord, one half as prompt to seize every opportunity for blessing the souls of men!

No doubt Satan acts at times directly upon the thoughts of men. He personally suggested to Judas the selling of his Master, and many another black insinuation has he cast into men's minds. Like the foul vulture which constantly feasted itself upon the vitals of Prometheus, so does the devil tear away the good thoughts which would be the life of a man's soul. Insatiably malicious, he cannot endure that a single divine truth should bless the heart. Fearful blasphemies, lewd imaginations, gross unbeliefs, or vain frivolities the devil casts into the mind like infernal bombshells to destroy any new-born thought which looks toward Christ and salvation. At one time he fascinates the mind, and anon he terrifies it; his one aim being to distract the man's thoughts from the gospel, and prevent its lodgment in the conscience and heart.

As Satan cannot be everywhere present at one time, he frequently does his evil work by his servants, sending the inferior spirits to act as fowls in devouring the seed, and these again employ various agents. With great cunning are the common incidents of life used in the evil business, so that even by things indifferent in themselves the purposes of the adversary are brought about. The preacher has some speciality in his manner, utterance, or appearance, and this becomes the bird which devours the seed: the hearer is so taken up with a trifling oddity in the minister that he forgets the truth which was spoken. An anecdote was related, an illustration employed, or a word used which awakened a memory in the hearer's breast, and away went the word out of his heart to make room for mere vanity. Or if the sermon was preserved to its close, it then encountered a fresh peril: a lost umbrella, an extra pressure in the aisle, a foolish jest overheard in the crowd, or the absurd dress of an unknown person, may any one of them answer the devil's purpose and snatch away the word. Little does it signify whether the seed is devoured by black crows or white doves, by great fowls or little sparrows: if it does not abide in the heart it cannot bring forth fruit, and hence the devil arranges that somehow he will take away the seed at once. If he never visits a place of worship at any other time, he will be sure to be there when a revival has begun,—"*then* cometh the devil." He lets many a pulpit alone, but when an earnest man begins preaching, "Satan cometh *immediately*."

II. Secondly, we will now for a moment notice his POWER. "And taketh away the word out of their hearts." It is not said that he tries

to do it, but that he actually does so. He sees, he comes, and he conquers. The word is there, and the devil takes it away as easily as a bird removes a seed from the wayside. Alas, what a sway has the evil one over the human mind, and how ineffectual is the preacher's work, unless a divine power is put forth with it. Perhaps from the striking manner in which it was stated, a little of the truth abides in the memory, but the enemy takes it quite out of the heart; and so the main part, the all-important part of our work is undone. *We* may be foolish enough to aim at the head only, but he who is crafty beyond all craft deals with the heart. Who will may win the intellect, if Satan can keep the affections he is quite content. To the man's heart the good seed is lost, the fowls have devoured it; it has become to him a nullity, having no power over him, no life in him. Not a trace is left, any more than there would be a mark remaining of seed cast on the wayside after the birds had taken it away: so effectual is the work of the prince of the power of the air. When Satan thinks it worth his while to come, and come immediately, he means business, and he takes care that his errand shall not fail.

His power is partly derived from his natural sagacity. Fallen as he now is, he was once an angel of light, and his superlative faculties, though perverted, defiled, and dimmed by the blighting influence of sin, are still vastly superior to those of the human beings upon whom he tries his arts. He is more than a match for preacher and hearer united if the Holy Spirit be not there to baffle him. He has also acquired fresh cunning by long practice in his accursed business. He knows the human heart better than anyone, except its Maker; for thousands of years he has studied the anatomy of our nature, and is conversant with our weaker points. We are all young and inexperienced compared with this ancient tempter, all narrow in our views and limited in our experience compared with this serpent, who is more subtle than all the beasts of the field: what wonder that he takes away the word which is sown in hard hearts.

Moreover, he derives his chief power from the man's condition of soul: it is easy for birds to pick up seed which lies exposed on a trodden path. If the soil had been good and the seed had entered it, he would have had far greater difficulty, he might even have been foiled; but a hard heart does the devil's work for him in great measure; he need not use violence or craft; there lies the unreceived word upon the surface of the soul, and he takes it away. The power of the evil one largely springs from our own evil. Let us pray the Lord to renew the heart that the testimony of Jesus may be accepted heartily, and may never be taken away. Great is the need for such prayer. Our adversary is no imaginary being, his existence is real, his presence constant, his power immense, his activity indefatigable. Lord, match him, and overmatch him. Drive away this foulest of fowls, break up the soil of the soul, and let thy truth truly live and graciously grow within us.

III. Our short sermon closes with the third point, which is the devil's PURPOSE. He is a sound theologian, and knows that salvation is by believing in the Lord Jesus; and hence he fears above all things lest men should "believe and be saved." The substance of the gospel lies in those few words, "believe and be saved," and in proportion as Satan

hates that gospel we ought to prize it. He is not so much afraid of works as of faith. If he can lead men to work, or feel, or do anything in the place of believing, he is content; but it is believing that he dreads, because God has coupled it with being saved. Every hearer should know this, and be instructed thereby to turn all his attention to the point which the devil considers to be worthy of his whole activity. If the destroyer labours to prevent the heart's believing, the wise will have their wits about them, and regard faith as the one thing needful.

"Lest they should believe and be saved" Satan takes away the word out of their hearts. Here also is wisdom,—wisdom hidden within the enemy's cunning. If the gospel remains in contact with the heart its tendency is to produce faith. The seed abiding in the soil springs up and brings forth fruit, and so will the gospel display its living power if it dwells within the man, and therefore the devil hastens to take it away. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, and the devil does not like to see it lie near the sinner for fear it should wound him. He dreads the influence of truth upon the conscience, and if he cannot prevent a man's hearing it he labours to prevent his meditating upon it. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God": to obliterate that which has been heard is the Satanic method of preventing faith. Here, again, is a practical word for the ear of prudence:—let us keep the gospel as much as possible near the mind of the unconverted, let us sow and sow again, if haply some grain may take root. Countrymen were wont in planting certain seeds to put in "one for the worm, and one for the crow, and then a third which would surely grow," and we must do the like. In the book of Jeremiah the Lord describes his own action thus,—"I spoke unto you rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called, but ye answered not": surely, if the Lord himself has thus continued to speak to an unanswering race we need not murmur if much of our preaching should appear to be in vain. There is life in the seed of the gospel, and it will grow if it can be got into the soil of the heart; let us therefore have faith in it, and never dream of obtaining a crop except by the old-fashioned way of sowing good seed. The devil evidently hates the word, let us then keep to it, and sow it everywhere.

Reader or hearer, you have often heard the gospel, have you heard it in vain? Then the devil has had more to do with you than you have dreamed. Is the thought a pleasant one? The presence of the devil is defiling and degrading, and he has been hovering over you as the birds over the high-road, and lighting upon you to steal away the Word. Think of this. Fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ you are missing by your unbelief, and instead thereof you are having fellowship with Satan. Is not this horrible? Instead of the Holy Ghost dwelling in you as he dwells in all believers, the prince of darkness is making you his resort, coming and going at his pleasure into your mind. You remember Jacob's dream of a ladder, and angels ascending and descending from himself to heaven: your life-experience may be set forth by another ladder which descends into the dark abyss, and up and down its rounds foul spirits come and go *to yourself!* Does not this startle you? The Lord grant it may. Do you desire a change? May the Holy Spirit turn your heart into good ground, and then shall the seed of divine grace grow in you, and produce faith in the Lord Jesus.

The Mustard Seed

A Sermon for the Sabbath-School Teacher

"Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it."—Luke xiii. 18, 19.

I SHALL not attempt fully to explain this great little parable. A full exposition may be left for another occasion. The parable may be understood to relate to our Lord himself, who is the living seed. You know also how his church is the tree that springs from him, and how greatly it grows and spreads its branches until it covers the earth. From the one man Christ Jesus, despised and rejected of men, slain and buried, and so hidden away from among men—from him, I say, there ariseth a multitude which no man can number. These spread themselves, like some tree which grows by the rivers of waters, and they yielded both gracious shelter and spiritual food. I called it a great little parable, and so it is: it has a world of teaching within the smallest compass. The parable is itself like a grain of mustard seed, but its meanings are as a great tree.

But at this time of the year, Sabbath-school teachers come together specially to pray for a blessing on their work; and pastors are invited to say a word to cheer them in their self-denying service. This request I would cheerfully fulfil; and therefore my discourse will not be a full explanation of the parable, but an adaptation of it to the cheering of those who are engaged in the admirable work of teaching the young the fear of the Lord. Never service more important: to overlook it would be a grave fault. We rejoice to encourage our friends in their labour of love.

In this parable light is thrown upon the work of those who teach the gospel. First, *notice a very simple work:* "a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden." Secondly, *observe what came of it:* "it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it."

I. First, NOTICE A VERY SIMPLE WORK. The work of teaching

the gospel is as the casting of a grain of mustard seed into a garden.

Note, first, *what the nameless man did.* "It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took." *He took it;* that is to say, picked it out from the bulk. It was only one grain, and a grain of a very insignificant seed; but he did not let it lie on the shelf; he took it in his hand to put it to its proper use. A grain of mustard seed is too small a thing for public exhibition; the man who takes it in his hand is almost the only one who spies it out. It was only a grain of mustard seed, but the man set it before his own mind as a distinct object to be dealt with. He was not sowing mustard over broad acres, but he was sowing "a grain of mustard seed" in his garden. It is well for the teacher to know what he is going to teach; to have that truth distinctly in his mind's eye, as the man had the grain of mustard seed between his fingers. Depend upon it, unless a truth is clearly seen and distinctly recognised by the teacher, little will come of it to the taught. It may be a very simple truth; but if a man takes it, understands it, grasps it, and loves it, he will do something with it. Beloved, first and foremost let us ourselves take the gospel, let us believe it, let us appreciate it, let us prize it beyond all things; for truth lives as it is loved, and no hand is so fit for its sowing as the hand which grasps it well.

Further, in this little parable we notice that this man *had a garden:* "Like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden." Some Christian people have no garden—no personal sphere of service. They belong to the whole clan of Christians, and they pine to see the entire band go out to cultivate the whole world; but they do not come to personal particulars. It is delightful to be warmed up by missionary addresses, and to feel a zeal for the salvation of all the nations; but, after all, the net result of a general theoretic earnestness for all the world does not amount to much. As we should have no horticulture if men had no gardens; so we shall have no missionary work done unless each person has a mission. It is the duty of every believer in Christ, like the first man, Adam, to have a garden to dress and to till. Children are in the Sunday-schools by millions: thank God for that! But have *you* a class of your own? All the church at work for Christ! Glorious theory! Are *you* up and doing for your Lord? It will be a grand time when every believer has his allotment, and is sowing it with the seed of truth. The wilderness and the solitary place will blossom as the rose when each Christian cultivates his own plot of roses. Where should this unnamed man sow his mustard seed but in his own garden? It was near him, and dear to him, and thither he went. Teach your own children, speak to your neighbours, seek the conversion of those whom God has especially entrusted to you.

Having a garden, and having this seed, *the man sowed it:* and simple as this is, it is the hinge of the instruction. You have a number of seeds in a pill-box. There they are: look at them! Take that box down this day twelve months, and the seeds will be just the same. Lay them by in that dry box for seven years, and nothing will happen. Truth is not to be kept to ourselves: it is to be

published and advocated. There is an old proverb, "Truth is mighty, and will prevail." The proverb is true in a sense; but it needs to be taken with a grain of salt. If you put truth away, and leave it without a voice, it won't prevail; it will not even contend. When have great truths prevailed? Why, when brave men have persisted in declaring them. Daring spirits have taken up a cause which has been, at the first, unpopular, and they have spoken about it so earnestly, and so often, that at length the cause has commanded attention: they have pressed on and on till the cause has triumphed altogether. Truth has been mighty, and has prevailed; but yet not without the men who gave it life and tongue. Not even the gospel itself, if it be not taught, will prevail. If revealed truth be laid on one side and kept in silence, it will not grow. Mark how, through the dark ages, the gospel lay asleep in old books in the libraries of monasteries, till Luther and his fellow reformers fetched it out and sowed it in the minds of men.

This man simply cast it into his garden. He did not wrap it round with gold leaf, or otherwise adorn it; but he put it into the ground. The naked seed came into contact with the naked soil. O teachers, do not try to make the gospel look fine; do not overlay it with your fine words, or elaborate explanations. The gospel seed is to be put into the young heart just as it is. Get the truth concerning the Lord Jesus into the children's minds. Make them know, not what you can say about the truth, but what the truth itself says. It is wicked to take the gospel and make a peg of it to hang our old clothes upon. The gospel is not a boat to be freighted with human thoughts, fine speculations, scraps of poetry, and pretty tales. No, no, the gospel is the thought of God: in and of itself it is the message which the soul needs. It is the gospel itself which will grow. Take a truth, specially that great doctrine, that man is lost and that Christ is the only Saviour, and see to it that you place it in the mind. Teach plainly the great truth that whosoever believeth in him hath everlasting life; and that the Lord Jesus bare our sins in his own body on the tree, and suffered for us, the just for the unjust—I say take these truths and set them forth to the mind, and see what will come of it. Sow the very truth; not your reflections on the truth, not your embellishments of the truth, but the truth itself. This is to be brought into contact with the mind; for the truth is the seed, and the human mind is the soil for it to grow in.

These remarks of mine are very plain and trite; and yet everything depends upon the simple operation described. Nearly everything has been tried in preaching of late, except the plain and clear statement of the glad tidings and of the atoning sacrifice. People have talked about what the church can do, and what the gospel can do: we have been informed as to the proofs of the gospel, or the doubts about it, and so forth; but when will they give us the gospel itself? Brethren, we must come to the point and teach the gospel, for this is the living and incorruptible seed which abideth for ever. It is an easy thing to deliver an address upon mustard seed, to give the children a taste of the pungency of mustard, to tell them how mustard seed would grow, what kind of a tree it would produce, and how the

birds would sing among its branches. But this is not sowing mustard seed. It is all very fine to talk about the influence of the gospel, the ethics of Christianity, the elevating power of the love of Christ, and so on; but what we want is the gospel itself, which exercises that influence. Sow the seed: tell the children the doctrine of the cross, the fact that with the stripes of Jesus we are healed, and that by faith in him we are justified. What is wanted is not talk about the gospel, but the gospel itself. We must continually bring the living word of the living God into contact with the hearts of men. Oh for the aid of the Holy Ghost in this! He will help us, for he delights to glorify Jesus.

That which is described in the parable was an insignificant business: the man took the tiny seed and put it into his garden. It is a very common-place affair to sit down with a dozen children around you, and open your Bible and tell them the well-worn tale of how Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. No Pharisee is likely to stand and blow a trumpet when he is going to teach children: he is more likely to point to the children in the temple, and sneeringly say, "Hearest thou what these say?" It is a lowly business altogether: but yet to the mustard seed, and to the man with a garden, the sowing is the all-important matter. The mustard seed will never grow unless put into the soil: the owner of the garden will never have a crop of mustard unless he sows the seed. Dear Sunday-school teacher, do not become weary of your humble work, for none can measure its importance. Tell the boys and girls of the Son of God, who lived and loved and died that the ungodly might be saved. Urge them to immediate faith in the mighty Saviour, that they may be saved at once. Tell of the new birth, and how the souls of men are renewed by the Holy Spirit, without whose divine working none can enter the kingdom of heaven. Cast in mustard seed, and nothing else but mustard seed, if you want to grow mustard. Teach the gospel of grace, and nothing but the gospel of grace, if you would see grace growing in the hearts of your young people.

Secondly, let us consider *what it was that the man sowed.* We have seen that he sowed: what did he sow? It was one single seed, and that seed a very small one; so very, very small, that the Jews were accustomed to say, "As small as mustard seed." Hence the Saviour speaks of it as the smallest among seeds; which it may not have been absolutely, but which it was according to common parlance; and our Lord was not teaching botany, but speaking a popular parable. Yes, the gospel seems a very simple thing: Believe and live! Look to Jesus dying in the sinner's stead! Look to Jesus crucified, even as Israel looked to the brazen serpent lifted up upon a pole. It is simplicity itself: in fact, the gospel is so plain a matter that our superior people are weary of it, and look out for something more difficult of comprehension. People nowadays are like the negro who liked to hear the Scriptures "properly confounded"; or like the other who said, "You should hear our minister dispense with the truth." Sowing seed is work too ordinary for the moderns: they demand new methods. But, beloved, we must not run after vain inventions: our one business is to sow the Word of God in the mind of children. It is yours and mine to teach

everybody the simple truth, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We know nothing else among men or among children. This one seed, apparently so little, so insignificant, we continue to sow. They sneeringly say, "What can be the moral result of peaching such a gospel? Surely it would be better to discourse upon morals, social economics, and the sciences?" Ah, friends! if you can do any good in those ways, we will not hinder you; but our belief is that a hundred times more can be done with the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth. The gospel is not the enemy of any good thing; say, rather, it is the force by which good things are to be carried out. Whatsoever things are pure and honest and of good repute, are all nurtured by that spirit which is begotten by the simple gospel of Christ. Yet conversions do not come by essays upon morals, but by the teaching of salvation by Christ. The cleansing and raising of our race will not be effected by politics or science, but by the Word of the Lord, which liveth and abideth for ever. To bring the greatest blessings upon our rising youth, we must labour to implant in their minds faith in the Lord Jesus. Oh, for divine power in this work!

But the seed, though very small, was *a living thing*. There is a great difference between a mustard seed and a piece of wax of the same size. Life slumbers in that seed. What life is, we cannot tell. Even if you take a microscope you cannot spy it out. It is a mystery: but it is essential to a seed. The gospel has a something in it not readily discoverable by the philosophical enquirer, if, indeed, he can perceive it at all. Take a maxim of Socrates or of Plato, and enquire whether a nation or a tribe has ever been transformed by it from barbarism to culture. A maxim of a philosopher may have measurably influenced a man in some right direction; but who has ever heard of a man's whole character being transformed by any observation of Confucius or Socrates? I confess I never have. Human teachings are barren. But within the gospel, with all its triteness and simplicity, there is a divine life, and that life makes all the difference. The human can never rival the divine, for it lacks the life-fire. It is better to preach five words of God's Word than five million words of man's wisdom. Men's words may seem to be the wiser and the more attractive, but there is no heavenly life in them. Within God's Word, however simple it may be, there dwells an omnipotence like that of God, from whose lips it came.

Truth to tell, a seed is *a very comprehensive thing*. Within the mustard seed what is to be found? Why, there is all in it that ever comes out of it. It must be so. Every branch, and every leaf, and every flower, and every seed that is to be, is, in its essence, all within the seed: it needs to be developed; but it is all there. And so, within the simple gospel, how much lies concentrated? Look at it! Within that truth lie regeneration, repentance, faith, holiness, zeal, consecration, perfection. Heaven hides itself away within the gospel. Like a young bird in its nest, glory dwells in grace. We may not at first see all its results, nor, indeed, shall we see them at all, till we sow the seed and it grows; but yet it is all there. Do you believe it, young

teacher? Have you realized what you have in your hold when you grasp the gospel of the grace of God? It is the most wonderful thing beneath the skies. Do you believe in the gospel which you have to teach? Do you discern that within its apparently narrow lines the Eternal, the Infinite, the Perfect, and the Divine are all enclosed? As in the Babe of Bethlehem there was the Eternal God, so within the simple teaching of "Believe and live" there are all the elements of eternal blessedness for men, and boundless glory for God. It is a very comprehensive thing, that little seed, that gospel of God.

And for this reason it is so wonderful: *it is a divine creation.* Summon your chemists: bring them together with all their vessels and their fires. Select a jury of the greatest chemists now alive, analytical or otherwise, as you will. Learned sirs, will you kindly make us a mustard seed? You may take a mustard seed, and pound it and analyze it, and you may thus ascertain all its ingredients. So far so good. Is not your work well begun? Now make a single mustard seed. We will give you a week. It is a very small affair. You have all the elements of mustard in yonder mortar. Make us one living grain: we do not ask for a ton weight. One grain of mustard seed will suffice us. Great chemists, have you not made so small a thing? A month has gone by. Only one grain of mustard seed we asked of you, and where is it? Have you not made one in a month? What are you at? Shall we allow you seven years? Yes, with all the laboratories in the kingdom at your service, and all known substances for your material, and all the world's coal-beds for your fuel, get to your work. The air is black with your smoke, and the streams run foul with your waste products; but where is the mustard seed? This baffles the wise men: they cannot make a living seed. No; and nobody can make a gospel, or even a new gospel text. The thinkers of the age could not even concoct another life of Christ to match with the four gospels which we have already. I go further: they could not create a new incident which would be congruous with the facts we already know. Plenty of novel writers nowadays can beat out imaginary histories upon their anvils: let them write a fifth gospel—say the gospel according to Peter, or Andrew. Let us have it! They will not even commence the task. Who will write a new Psalm, or even a new promise? Clever chemists prove their wisdom by saying at once, "No, we cannot make a mustard seed"; and wise thinkers will equally confess that they cannot make another gospel. My learned brethren are trying very hard to make a new gospel for this nineteenth century; but you teachers had better go on with the old one. The advanced men cannot put life into their theory. This living Word is the finger of God. That simple grain of mustard seed must be made by God, or not at all; and he must put life into the gospel, or it will not have power in the heart. The gospel of Sunday-school teachers, that gospel of "Believe and live," however men may despise it, has God-given life in it. You cannot make another which can supplant it; for you cannot put life into your invention. Go on and use the one living truth with your children, for nothing else has God's life in it.

I want you to see what a little affair the sowing seemed, as we

answer the question, *What was it to him?* It was *a very natural act;* he sowed a seed. It is a most natural thing that we should teach others what we believe ourselves. I cannot make out how some professors can call themselves Christians, and yet never communicate the faith to others. That the young people of our churches should gather other young people around them, and tell them of Jesus, whom they love, is as natural as for a gardener to put seeds into his prepared ground.

To sow a mustard seed is *a very inexpensive act.* Only one grain of mustard: nobody can find me a coin small enough to express its value. I do not know how much mustard seed the man had; certainly it is not a rare thing; but he only took one grain of it, and cast it into his garden. He emptied no exchequer by that expenditure; and this is one of the excellencies of Sabbath-school work, that it neither exhausts the church of men nor of money. However much of it is done, it does not lessen the resources of our Zion: it is done freely, quietly, without excitement, without sacrifice of life; and yet what a fountain of blessing it is!

Still, it was *an act of faith.* It is always an act of faith to sow seed; because you have, for the time, to give it up, and receive nothing in return. The farmer takes his choice seed-corn, and throws it into the soil of his field. He might have made many a loaf of bread with it; but he casts it away. Only his faith saves him from being judged a maniac: he expects it to return to him fifty-fold. If you had never seen a harvest, you would think that a man burying good wheat under the clods had gone mad; and if you had never seen conversions, it might seem an absurd thing to be constantly teaching to boys and girls the story of the Man who was nailed to the tree. We preach and teach as a work of faith; and, remember, it is only as an act of faith that it will answer its purpose. The rule of the harvest is, "According to thy faith, be it unto thee." Believe, dear teacher, believe in the gospel. Believe in what you are doing when you tell it. Believe that great results from slender causes spring. Go on sowing your mustard seed of salvation by faith, expecting and believing that fruit will come thereof.

It was an act which brought the sower no honour. The Saviour has chronicled the fact that the man took a grain of mustard seed and sowed it; but thousands of men had gone on sowing mustard seed for half a lifetime without a word. Nobody has ever spoken in your honour, my friend, though you have taught the truth. Dear teacher, go on sowing, though nobody should observe your diligence, or praise your faithfulness. Sow the seed of precious truth in the garden of the child's mind; for much more will come of it than you have dared to hope.

It seems to me that our Lord selected the mustard seed in this parable, not because its results are the greatest possible from a seed—for an oak or a cedar are much greater growths than a mustard tree—but he selected it because it is the greatest result as compared with the size of the seed. Follow out the analogy. Come to yonder school, and see! That earnest young man is teaching a boy, one of those wild creatures of the street; they swarm in every quarter. A dozen young

Turks are before him, or say young Arabs of the street; he is teaching them the gospel. Small affair, is it not? Yes, very; but what may come of it? Think of how joyfully much may grow out of this little! What is that young man teaching? Only one elementary truth. Do not sneer; it is truth, but it is the mere alphabet of it. He touches upon nothing deep in theology: he only says, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Dear boy, believe in the Lord Jesus, and live." That is all he says. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The teacher himself is teaching the one truth in a very poor way; at least, *he* thinks so. Ask him, when he has done, what he thinks of his own teaching; and he replies, "I do not feel fit to teach." Yes, that young man's teaching is sighed over; and in his own judgment it is poor and weak; but there is life in the truth he imparts, and eternal results will follow—results of which I have now to speak in the second part of my sermon. May the good Spirit help me so to speak as to encourage my beloved friends, who have given themselves up to the Christ-like work of teaching the little ones!

II. Secondly, let us enquire, WHAT CAME OF IT?

First, "*it grew*." That was what the sower hoped would come of it: he placed the seed in the ground, hoping that it would grow. It is not reasonable to suppose that he would have sown it if he had not hoped that it would spring up. Dear teacher, do you always sow in hope, do you trust that the Word will live and grow? If you do not, I do not think your success is very probable. Expect the truth to take root, and expand and grow up. Teach divine truth with earnestness, and expect that the life within it will unveil its wonders.

But though the sower expected growth, he could not himself have made it grow. After he had placed the seed in the ground, he could water it, he could pray God to make the sun shine on it; but he could not directly produce growth. Only he that made the seed could cause it to grow. Growth is a continuance of that almighty act by which life is at first given. The putting of life into the seed is God's work, and the bringing forth of the life from the seed is God's work too. This is a matter within your hope, but far beyond your power.

A very wonderful thing it is, that the seed should grow. If we did not see it every day, we should be more astonished at the growth of seed than at all the wonders of magicians. A growing seed is God's abiding miracle. You see a piece of ground near London covered with a market-garden, and after a few months you go by the place, and you see streets, and a public square, and a church, and a great population. You say to yourself, "It is remarkable that all these houses should have sprung up in a few months." Yet that is not at all so wonderful as for a ploughed field to become covered four feet high with corn, and all without the use of waggons to bring the material, or tools to work it up into a harvest. Without noise of hammer, or the ringing of trowels; without handiwork of man, the whole has been done. Wonder at the growth of grace. See how it increases, deepens, strengthens! Growth in grace is a marvel of divine love. That a man should repent through the gospel, that he should believe in Jesus, that he should be totally changed, that he should have a hope of heaven, that he should receive power to become a child of God—these

are all marvellous things; and yet they are going on under our eyes, and we fail to admire them as we should. The growth of holiness in such fallen creatures as we are, is the admiration of angels, the delight of all intelligent beings.

To the sower this growth was very pleasing. How pleasant it is to see the seed of grace grow in children! Do you not remember when you first sowed mustard-and-cress as a boy, how the very next morning you went and turned the ground up to see how much it had grown. How pleased you were when you saw the little yellow shoot, and afterwards a green leaf or two! So is it with the true teacher: he is anxious to see growth, and he makes eager enquiry for it. What he expected is taking place, and it is most delightful to him, whatever it may be to others. An unsympathetic person cries, "Oh, I do not think anything of that child's emotions. It is merely a passing impression: he will soon forget it." The teacher does not think so. The cold critic says, "I don't think much of a child's weeping. Children's tears lie very near the surface." But the teacher is full of hope that he sees in these tears a real sorrow for sin, and an earnest seeking after the Lord. The questioner says, "It is nothing for a child to say that he gives his heart to Jesus. Youngsters soon think that they believe. They are so easily led." People talk thus because they do not love children, and live with the desire to save them. If you sympathize with children, you are pleased with every hopeful token, and are on the watch for every mark of divine life within them. If you are a florist, you will see more of the progress of your plants than if you are no gardener, and have no interest in such things. Think, then, of what my text says: "It grew." Oh, for a prayer just now, from all of you this morning, "Lord, make the gospel grow wherever it falls! Whether the preacher scatters it, or the teacher sows it; whether it falls among the aged people, or the young; Lord, make the gospel grow!" Pray hard for it, brethren! You cannot make it grow: but you can prevail with God to bless it to his honour and praise.

Next, having started growing, *it became a tree;* Luke says, "It waxed a great tree." It was great in itself; but the greatness was seen mainly in comparison with the size of the seed. The growth was great. Here is the wonder: not that it became a tree, but that, being a mustard seed, it should become "a great tree." Do you see the point of the parable? I have already brought it before you. Listen! It was only a word spoken—"Dear boy, look to Jesus." Only such a word, and a soul was saved, its sin was forgiven, its whole being was changed, a new heir of heaven was born. Do you see the growth? A word produces salvation! A grain of mustard seed becomes a great tree! A little teaching brings eternal life. That is not all: the teacher, with many prayers and tears, took her girl home, and pleaded with her for Christ, and the girl was led to yield her heart to the dominion of Christ Jesus—a holy, heavenly life came out of that pleading. See! she becomes a thoughtful girl, a loving wife, a gracious mother, a matron in Israel, such a one as Dorcas among the poor, or Hannah with her Samuel. What a great result from a little cause! The teacher's words were tearfully spoken; they could not have been printed, for they were far too broken and childlike; but they were,

in God's hands, the means of fashioning a life most sweet, most chaste, most beautiful.

A boy was about as wild as any roamer of our streets: a teacher knelt by his side, with his arm about the lad's neck. He pleaded with God for the boy, and with the boy for God. That boy was converted, and as a youth in business he was an example to the workroom; as a father, he was a guide to his household; as a man of God, he was a light to all around; as a preacher of righteousness, he adorned the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. There is much more which I might easily picture; but you can work it out as well as I can. All that is to be desired may spring out of the simple talk of a humble Christian with a youth. A mustard seed becomes a great tree; a few words of holy admonition may produce a noble life.

But is that all? Beloved, our teaching may preserve souls from the deep darkness of the abode of the lost. A soul left to itself might hurry down from folly to vice, from vice to obduracy, from obduracy to fixed resolve to perish; but by the means of loving teaching all this is changod. Rescued from the power of sin, like a lamb snatched from between the jaws of the lion, the youth is now no longer the victim of vice, but seeks holy and heavenly things. Hell has lost its prey; and see up yonder, heaven's wide gate has received a precious soul. "Sweeping through the gates of the New Jerusalem" many have come who were led there from the Sunday-school. They who once were foul are now white-robed, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Hark to their songs of praise! You may keep on listening, for those songs will never come to an end. All this was brought about through a brief address of a trembling brother who stood up one Sunday afternoon to close the school and talk a little about the cross of Jesus. Or all this came of a gentle sister who could never have spoken in public, but yet was enabled to warn a young girl who was growing giddy, and seemed likely to go sadly astray. Wonderful that a soul's taking the road to heaven or to hell should be made, in the purpose of God, to hinge upon the humble endeavours of a weak but faithful teacher! You see how the mustard seed grew till it waxed a great tree.

This great tree became a shelter: "the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it." Mustard in the East does grow very large indeed. The commonest kind of it may be found eight or ten feet high; but there is a kind which will grow almost like a forest tree, and there probably were some of these latter trees in the sheltered region wherein our Lord was speaking. A mustard which grew here and there in Palestine was of surprising dimensions. When the tree grew, the birds came to it. Here we have *unexpected influences.* Think of it. That man took a mustard seed which you could hardly see if I held it up. When he took the mustard seed, when he put it into his garden, had he any thought of bringing birds to that spot? Not he. You do not know all you are doing when you are teaching a child the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. When you are trying to bring a soul to Christ, your action has ten thousand hooks to it, and these may seize on innumerable things. Holy teaching is the opening of a well, and no one knows all the effect which the waters will produce on that spot. There seems no

link between sowing a grain of mustard seed and birds of the air; but the winged wanderers soon made a happy connection. There may seem no connection between teaching that boy and the reclaiming of cannibals in New Guinea; but I can see a very possible connection. Tribes in Central Africa may have their destiny shaped by your instruction of a tiny child. When John Pounds bribed an urchin with a hot potato to come and learn to read the Bible, I am sure John Pounds had no idea of all the Ragged-schools in London; but there is a clear line of cause and effect in the whole matter. A hot potato might be the coat of arms of the Ragged-school Union. When Nasmyth went about from house to house visiting in the slums of London, I do not suppose that he saw in his act the founding of the London City Mission and all the Country Town Missions. No man can tell the end of his beginnings, the growth of his sowings. Go on doing good in little ways, and you shall one day wonder at the great results. Do the next thing that lies before you. Do it well. Do it unto the Lord. Leave results with his unbounded liberality of love; but hope to reap at least a hundred-fold.

How many fowls came and roosted under that one mustard tree I do not know. How many birds in a day, how many birds in the year, came and found a resting-place, and picked the seeds they loved so well, I cannot tell. When one person is converted, how many may receive a blessing out of him none can tell. Now is the day for romances: our literature is drenched with tales religious or irreligious. What stories might be written concerning benefits bestowed, directly and indirectly, by a single godly man or woman! When you have written a thrilling story upon the subject, I can assure you I can match it with something better still. One single individual can scatter benedictions across a continent, and belt the world with blessing.

But what is that I hear? I see this mustard tree—it is a very wonderful tree; but I not only see, I hear! Music! music! The birds! the birds! It is early morning, the sun is scarcely up—what torrents of song! Is that the way to produce music? Shall I sow mustard seed, and reap songs? I thought we must buy an organ, or purchase a violin; or by some wind or stringed instrument come at music; but here is a new plan altogether. Nebuchadnezzar had his flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music; but all that mingled sound could not rival the melody of birds. I shall sow mustard seed now, and get music in God's own way. Friends, when you teach your children the gospel of the Lord Jesus, you are sowing the music of heaven. Every time you tell the tidings of pardon bought with blood, you are filling the choirs of glory with sweet voices, which, to the Eternal Name, shall, day and night, trill out songs of devout gratitude. Go on, then, if this is to be the result. If even heaven's high harmonies depend upon the simple teaching of a Ragged-school, let us never cease from our hallowed service.

Having said so much, I now close with these three practical observations. *Are we not highly honoured to be entrusted with such a marvellous thing as the gospel?* If it be a seed comprehending so much within it, which will come to so much if it be properly used, blessed and happy are we to have such good news to proclaim! I thought this morning,

when I awoke into the damp and rain, and felt my bones complaining I shall be glad when four more Sundays shall have gone, and I shall be free to take a little rest in a sunnier clime. Jaded in mind, and weary in spirit, I braced myself with this reflection—what blessed work I have to do! What a glorious gospel have I to preach! I ought to be a very happy man to have such glad tidings to bear to my fellows. I said to myself, "So I am." Well now, beloved teacher, next Sunday, when you leave your bed, and say, "I have had a hard week's work, and I could half wish that I had not to go to my class"; answer yourself thus: "But I am a happy person to have to talk to children about Christ Jesus. If I had to teach them arithmetic or carpentering, I might get tired of it; but to talk about Jesus, whom I love, why, it is a joy for ever.

Let us be encouraged to sow the good seed in evil times. If we do not see the gospel prospering elsewhere, let us not despair; if there were no more mustard seed in the world, and I had only one grain of it, I should be all the more anxious to sow it. You can produce any quantity if only one seed will grow. So now to-day there is not very much gospel about; the church has given it up; a great many preachers preach everything but the living truth. This is sad; but it is a strong reason why you and I should teach more gospel than ever. I have often thought to myself—Other men may teach Socialism, deliver lectures, or collect a band of fiddlers, that they may gather a congregation; but I will preach the gospel. I will preach more gospel than ever if I can; I will stick more to the one cardinal point. The other brethren can attend to the odds and ends, but I will keep to Christ crucified. To the men of vast ability, who are looking to the events of the day, I would say, "Allow one poor fool to keep to preaching the gospel." Beloved teachers, be fools for Christ, and keep to the gospel. Don't you be afraid: it has life in it, and it will grow: only you bring it out, and let it grow. I am sometimes afraid that we may prepare our sermons and addresses too much, so as to make ourselves shine. If so, we are like the man who tried to grow potatoes—he never grew any, and he wondered much; "for," said he, "I very carefully boiled them for hours." So, it is very possible to extract all the life out of the gospel, and put so much of yourself into it that Christ will not bless it.

And, lastly, *we are bound to do it.* If so much will come out of so little, we are bound to go in for it. Nowadays people want ten per cent. for their money. Hosts of fools are readily caught by any scheme, or speculation, or limited liability company, that promises to give them immense dividends! I should like to make you wise by inviting you to an investment which is sure. Sow a mustard seed, and grow a tree. Talk of Christ, and save a soul: that soul saved will be a blessing for ages, and a joy to God throughout eternity. Was there ever such an investment as this? Let us go on with it. If on our simple word eternity is hung, let us speak with all our heart. Life, death, and hell, and worlds unknown, hang on the lips of the earnest teacher of the gospel of Jesus: let us never cease speaking while we have breath in our body. The Lord bless you! Amen, and Amen.

The Pleading of the Last Messenger

"Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others"—Mark xii. 6—9.

BRETHREN, you know the story of God's dealing with Israel, and Israel's dealing with God. The Lord chose their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he made them a race separated unto himself, he brought them out of Egypt from under the iron yoke; he led them through the Red Sea; he fed them for forty years in the wilderness; he led them about and tutored them, even as a man teacheth his son. In due time he brought them into the land which floweth with milk and honey; and he put them under a dispensation eminently gentle and full of tenderness, where as a nation they might enjoy unbroken prosperity, "sitting every man under his vine and under his fig tree, none making them afraid." All that he required of them was that he should be their God, that they should put no idols in his place, but should obey his statutes. Alas! from the first they copied the nations among whom they dwelt: they set up the gods of Egypt when they were in the wilderness, and in Canaan they went astray after the polluted deities of the nations. They worshipped defiled gods with rites obscene; they even passed their children through the fire to Moloch, and did horrible things which angered the Most High. In his longsuffering he sent to them prophets one after another—prophets who received unworthy treatment at their hands whenever they rebuked their sins. The prophets were derided, persecuted, and even slain with the sword. God in great patience sent them more of his messengers, some of them grandly eloquent, like Esaias and Ezekiel; others of them full of tears, like Jeremiah; or clothed with dignity, like Daniel. They warned the people, and ceased not to plead with them, whether they would hear or whether they would forbear. Cruel treatment awaited many of the servants of the Lord; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder.

Israel rejected the servants that came from the great Householder

asking for the rent of his vineyard. They repudiated the claims of God, and cast off allegiance to him with contempt and disdain; until at last the nation was led into captivity, and in the end only lingered on the chosen soil as a mere remnant. Judah wept upon the dunghill; whereas aforetime she was adorned with bridal ornaments, and sat upon the throne. The adversary ruled in the halls of David; for the days of Herod, the Idumean tyrant, had come. The Roman yoke was heavy upon the people: their sins had brought them low. God, in his infinite compassion, gave them one more opportunity. He had one Son, his Wellbeloved Son, and he sent him to his Israel. With lips that dropped mercy, and with eyes that overflowed with tenderness, he came. "Oh, that thou hadst known," said he, "even thou, in this thy day"! He wept over the city which would not be saved. But his warning and his weeping were lost upon the blinded people. Those who had rejected the prophets, also rejected the Lord: the fate of the servants was repeated in "the heir." "Let us kill him," said they; and they put him to the death of the cross. You know the story: it is full of infinite mercy on God's part, and of immeasurable guilt on the part of man. God seemed to out-do himself in his long-suffering, and man seemed to out-do himself in his wanton defiance of the Most High. Sin culminated in the murder of the Son of God; it reached its utmost height of horror when the cry was heard, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Yes, they crucified the Lord of Glory.

What has this to do with us? I am not going to preach this morning merely to rehearse a piece of ancient history which has no bearing on to-day; I do not so regard the death of our Lord. My anxiety is to reach the consciences of living men, and, if possible, to win to the Blessed Heir of all things, who has risen from the dead, some of those who have had a share in his death. I would bring to the Great Householder the fruits of the vineyard which he himself has planted, and I would move many hearts to relent towards him at the remembrance of the wicked injuries which have been done to his servants and to his Son. May the Spirit of God silently move over this audience at this time, as I try to use this passage, not in its strictest application, but with such an application as I am sure the Spirit of God will approve! May he bless the Saviour's word to present uses, that we may this day repent!

The fact is, that unless changed by divine grace, we have all refused to pay to our great God the service which is due to him. He has put us here and given us this life, like a vineyard, for us to cultivate; but many have cultivated that vineyard entirely for themselves—themselves or their families and friends, and not for their God, their Maker. "God is not in all their thoughts." Now, the Lord has sent to such many messengers. We have had no prophets in these days living among us; but we have the Word of God and the record of the testimonies of his inspired messengers, and these virtually speak to us. We have Moses and the prophets: they are speaking to us even now. Besides that, we have been surrounded by men of God, and encompassed by holy women who have appealed to us on God's behalf. They have been urged to speak by the love of their hearts, and they have tried to bring us to repent of past rebellion and to yield ourselves at once to God. Many are the voices

around us and within us which persuade to render unto the great Householder his due; but in many cases none of these have been successful. Last of all God has sent to each one of us his Son, that he in his own person may lovingly repeat with greater emphasis the requirements of the Lord of love. The incarnate wisdom now cries to us, "My son, give me thine heart." Jesus warns us, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He sets before us the way of reconciliation, and bids us believe in him and live. With many a charming parable he would draw the far-off prodigal home to the bosom of forgiving love. The very coming of the Son of God in human form, as Emmanuel, God with us, is love's great plea for reconciliation. Who can resist so powerful an argument? It is in the person of Jesus Christ that God makes his last and strongest appeal to the human conscience. By the Christ of God, he virtually saith this morning, "Turn ye, turn ye: why will ye die, O house of Israel?" And I would to God that the answer might be from many a heart, "Come, let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us." Cause it to be so, O great Spirit!

Three things I shall speak of this morning, and the first will be *the amazing mission:* "Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son." Secondly, *the astounding crime:* "They took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard." And, therefore, thirdly, *the appropriate punishment,* of which the text says, "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?" What vengeance can be sufficient for so base a deed?

I. First, then, let us dwell for a few moments upon THE AMAZING MISSION: "Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also."

Please remember concerning the Son of God, sent to us to reconcile us to the Father, that *he came after many rejections of divine love.* As to Israel he followed the prophets, so to us he comes after many others. There are none among us, I should think, who have been left without admonitions and expostulations from God. He began early with some of us, calling us, like Samuel, when as yet we were children. He repeated those calls to us all through the days of our youth. It was never cheap to some of us to sin; we never went astray but what there was a something within which plucked us by the sleeve, and warned us of our wrong-doing. We have been called to God by most earnest entreaties of faithful men and affectionate women. Discourses have been addressed to us which might have moved hearts of stone; but yet, though stirred for the moment, we remain obstinate enemies to God, dishonest to his claims, careful of this world, and forgetful of the world to come. After all these refusals, if the Lord had closed the casket of mercy, and had opened the vials of vengeance and had poured them out upon us, who could have blamed him? Instead of which, he still, in his longsuffering pity, speaks to us by his Son. Jesus Christ, by whom he made the worlds, condescends to be the Messenger of the covenant of grace. He gently reminds us of our offences against the great Father, of our wilfulness in not returning to him, and of the tremendous peril which we incur by remaining in opposition to the great God. The very existence

of our Saviour gives us warning of our sin, of our ruin, and of the only way of escape. If it be so, that we have rejected God's claims so often, will not the time past suffice us to have played this dreadful game? Have we not had enough of trifling with our souls? O Lord, how long shall men act the part of fools and risk their immortal souls? Oh, will they not at length yield to wisdom? Jesus himself, by the preaching of the gospel, pleads with us: are we determined to persevere in our evil ways? Do we not feel some tender relentings? Does not a "still small voice" urge us to arise and go to our Father? After many provocations, will we not at length yield to the God of grace?

Remember, that Jesus Christ when he comes to us to-day, as the messenger of the Father, *comes for no personal ends.* When the messengers were sent by the householder, it was to claim the householder's rent; when the heir came, it was for the same purpose. So it is in the human emblem; but in the divine this becomes less conspicuous. When Jesus pleads with us, although he urges us to render unto God our love and our obedience, yet God does not stand in need of these as the householder stood in need of his rents. What is it to the infinite Jehovah whether thou serve him or not? If thou rebel against God, will he be less glorious? If thou wilt not obey the Lord, what difference can it make to his boundless happiness? Will his crown shine the less brightly, or his heaven be less resplendent because thou choosest to be a rebel against him? What if the tow strive with the fire, will the fire be quenched thereby? If a gnat should contend with yonder blast furnace, you know what the end would be. It is for thine own sake that God would have thee yield to him; how can it be for his own? If he were hungry he would not tell thee, for the cattle on a thousand hills are his. He can crush whole worlds to dust, "or with his word or with his nod"; and dost thou think he has aught to gain from thee? Thou alone wilt be the gainer or the loser; therefore when Jesus prays thee to repent, believe thou in the disinterestedness of his heart; believe that it can be nothing but the tenderest regard for thy well-being which makes him warn thee. Hear how Jehovah puts it: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." A messenger after many rejections, a messenger who comes solely out of love to us, ought to have our respectful attention.

Let us see for a minute who this messenger is. *He is one greatly beloved of his Father*, and in himself *he is of surpassing excellence.* The Lord Jesus Christ is so inconceivably glorious that I tremble at any attempt to describe his glory. Assuredly, he is very God of very God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, and yet he deigned to take upon himself a human form. He was born an infant into our weakness, and he lived a carpenter to share our toil. When he quits the bench and the saw it is to follow still more laborious ways as a teacher and healer of the people. He was the lowly and suffering teacher of the blessed will of the Father. He took upon himself the form of a servant, and yet in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, and yet he took a towel and washed his disciples' feet. Such is he who pleads with you. So majestic and so compassionate, so great, and yet so good: will you refuse him? If I plead with you, I

am but as you are, flesh of your flesh; but if Jesus speaks to you, I beseech you by the glory of his Godhead, as well as by the tenderness of his manhood, do not refuse him. Because of his Godhead you must not dare to harden your hearts. He is God's wellbeloved; and if you are wise, he will be yours. Do not turn your back upon him whom all the angels worship. Beware, lest thou reject One whom God loves so well; for he will take it as an insult to himself: he that despises the anointed of God has blasphemed God himself. Thou puttest thy finger into the very eye of God when thou dost slight his Son. In grieving the Christ thou dost vex the very heart of God; therefore do not do so. I beseech thee, then, by the love which God bears to his Son, to listen to this matchless messenger of mercy, who would fain persuade thee to repent.

I have already said that he is so glorious that I cannot describe him; I will therefore only say that *his graciousness is as conspicuous as his glory*. There was never such a one as he. None of us loves men as Christ loves them; and if the loves of all the tender-hearted in the world could be run together, they would make but a drop compared with the ocean of the compassion of Jesus. Of old his delights were with the sons of men; and though he might have been happy enough among the angels, yet he quitted their company that he might take up this inferior race. Yea, he espoused our nature, and became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, for love of that chosen company whom he calls his Bride. He hid not his face from shame and spitting, nor his body from the shedding of blood, nor his soul from deadly agony; but he loved the church, and gave himself for it. It is this lover of souls that becomes God's advocate with us, and pleads with us that we would cease from our rebellion. Do not refuse him! If he were stern and unloving, I could imagine that all the obstinacy of your nature might be aroused; but his love, which passeth the love of women, deserves another treatment. If you reject him, he answers you with tears; if you wound him, he bleeds out cleansing; if you kill him, he dies to redeem; if you bury him, he rises again to bring us resurrection. Jesus is love made manifest.

> "Heart of stone, relent, relent;
> Break, by Jesu's cross subdued!
> See his body, mangled, rent,
> Cover'd with a gore of blood;
> Sinful soul, what hast thou done?
> Crucified God's only Son!"

Furthermore, *his manner is most winning*. When I have been pleading for men with God, and I have ceased my pleading, I have feared that something in my tone or in my manner would cause my pleading to fail. I am not, perhaps, so tender as I should be, nor is there sufficient pathos in my tones. If I could do better, I would go to any school to learn. God has put me often to the school of suffering to instruct me in this respect; and yet I do confess my failings with deep regret. But when Jesus, my Lord, pleads with you, this charge cannot be laid against him. His pleading is perfect. When Jonah preaches, his tones are harsh, and his spirit forbidding; but that can never be said of Jesus. When Jeremiah weeps, there is an undertone of bitter complaint

within the sweet sorrow of his love; but it is never so with Jesus. "Never man spake like this man." If ever his words thunder—as they often do—even in that thunder there is heard the voice of love. When he flashes with the lightning of judgment against Scribes and Pharisees, yet soft mercy-drops follow every flame of fire. He is stern because he is tender: his utterances of terror are born of a love which dares not conceal the truth, even though it breaks its heart in the telling of it. God is love, and Christ is God's love incarnate among men. Therefore, my hearer, if you see anything about *me* of which you disapprove, censure me if you will; but be all the more attentive to my Lord, about whom there is nothing but what is wooing and melting. God has sent to you his own wellbeloved Son; I implore you, do not refuse him. My heart trembles at the bare suspicion that even one of you should reject the pleadings of one so jealous for your eternal welfare.

Yet again, when God sends his Son to plead with men, remember he does not urge us to anything which will be for our loss and detriment: *obedience to him is happiness for ourselves.* He does not urge us to follow a life of misery, nor to begin a course which will end in our destruction. Far from it. The ways in which he would have us run are ways of pleasantness, and all the paths in which he would lead us are paths of peace. Even repentance is charming sorrow, far more sweet than the joy of sin. They that repent and turn to God through Jesus Christ find such joy, such happiness, that earth becomes to them the vestibule of heaven. The joy-bells ring within the Father's house, when a soul returns to its home. The great Father leads the joy, and all the household rejoice with him. To persuade you to be holy is to induce you to be happy; to urge you to seek God is to urge you to seek your own best welfare; to urge you to lay down the weapons of rebellion and be reconciled to the Most High, is to set before you the wisest, safest, and best course that you can follow. Therefore, hear ye him. The Lord God out of heaven cries to you: "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." Well may ye hear him, when every word that he speaks intends your salvation.

Remember, once more, that if you do not hear the wellbeloved Son of God, you have refused your last hope. *He is God's ultimatum.* Nothing remains when Christ is refused. No one else can be sent; heaven itself contains no further messenger. If Christ be rejected, hope is rejected. Neither would you be converted though one rose from the dead; for Jesus has risen from the dead, and you have refused him. I should like every person here that is unconverted to recollect that there is no other gospel, and no more sacrifice for sin. I have heard talk of "a larger hope" than the gospel sets before us: it is a fable, with nothing in Scripture to warrant it. Rejecting Christ, you have rejected all; you have shut against yourself the one door of hope. Christ, who knows better than all pretenders, declares that, "He that believeth not shall be damned." There remains nothing but damnation for those who believe not in Jesus. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." This is clear; for heaven's grandest effort has been made. What more can God do? O heavens and earth! I appeal to you, what more can Jehovah do? If he gives his Son to die, and that great sacrifice is rejected, what

remains? Infinite wisdom has done its best, and infinite love has surpassed itself: a fearful looking for of judgment is all that despisers may expect.

Thus this amazing mission is set forth before you, and I pray you, as you love yourselves, do not refuse him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, how shall they escape who despise him that speaketh from heaven?

II. I beg your attention while I look, in the second place, to THE ASTOUNDING CRIME. It was nothing less than an astounding crime, that when this householder sent his wellbeloved son, the husbandmen said one to another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and cast him out of the vineyard." "No," says one, "we never killed the Son of God." I will not charge you with having done so *literally;* that were to make myself chargeable with exaggeration. But a man may do virtually what he cannot do actually. If a murder be committed and I approve of it, if my own principles lead up to it, if I feel no indignation against it, but express myself very coolly about it, if there is reason to believe that if I had been there, I should have done the same, then I may be in the sight of God a partaker in the crime. There are many among us who are guilty of the body and blood of Christ. The hymn we just now sung does not bring a groundless charge.

> "Yes, thy sins have done the deed,
> Driven the nails that fix'd him there,
> Crown'd with thorns his sacred head,
> Plunged into his side the spear,
> Made his soul a sacrifice,
> While for sinful man he dies!"

Now, I say this, that all those who persistently deny the deity of Christ, virtually kill him; for the Son of God is not alive if his Godhead be not in existence. It is essential to the idea of Christ, the heir of all things, that he be God, and to deny his Godhead is to stab at his heart.

All those who deny his atonement also slay him; for the blood of sacrifice is the life of the Christ of God. The very essence of his Christhood, the soul of his character as Jesus, lies in his having been appointed to be a propitiation for sin. No cross no Christ, no atonement no cross. Deny the great expiation for sin, and to the full extent of your power you have annihilated the Christ. As far as you can do it, you have destroyed the Saviour.

"Well, we have not done that," cry some of you. "We have been no opposers of the deity or sacrifice of Jesus." But let me remind you that if you do not judge him to be worthy of your most careful thoughts, if you are indifferent to his claims, and refuse to obey his gospel, you have virtually put him away. To you it is the same as if there were no Christ.

> "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?
> Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"

You have virtually answered "It is nothing." You have set Christ down as nothing compared with the business of daily life, and thus you have virtually slain him: you have put him out of existence so far as

you are concerned. In the little world of your mind there is no living Saviour: he is dead and buried to you, and the claims of God which he pleads you will not think upon. You have been occupied all the week with trivial amusements, or unimportant discussions, but you have not deigned to think of him whose advent into the world is so great a wonder, that if you never thought of anything else, you might be justified in a life of devout meditation. He who deserves all your thoughts gets none of them. You have nothing to do with Christ, his cross, his people, or his cause; and therefore—I say it with no harshness, but with much grief—you are kill-Christs, and are guilty of his blood. I charge you with making away with your Saviour. I press the accusation home, and trust that it will strike you with horror.

I have still closer work with some of you, who are most assuredly guilty. You were once members of the Church; you came to the communion-table, where they gather who remember his precious body and blood; you used to glory in his name; but you have gone back, you have denied the faith, you have ceased to be followers of the Lamb. Now, these are no words of mine, but inspired words:—You have "crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." You are beyond all question among those who have cast the heir out of the vineyard and slain him, deliberately turning your backs upon his sacred cause. The Lord have mercy on you! You have had no mercy on Christ, or on yourselves.

I must press this home upon a great many more who have heard of Christ, and believe him to be God, and assent to all the truth about him, but who yet have never yielded themselves to his authority. O sirs, what have you done? You have preferred the world to Christ: you have chosen Barabbas and condemned the Saviour. You have said to the claims of Jesus, "Wait." For whom has your Lord had to wait? What! For a harlot? For a bribe of gold? For your giddy pleasure? When a great question is postponed to let another take precedence of it, we do not object if that other is of pre-eminent importance; but can you say that anything has a greater claim on you than the Son of God? Is there anything that has a greater right to your thoughts, to your consideration, to your love, than the great salvation which Jesus Christ has wrought out? If you have pushed the Lord Jesus Christ out of the first place, he will occupy no other, and therefore you have virtually un-Christed him, and you are guilty of his blood. You must either be justified by him or you must be condemned by him. There is no third course to take: you must either believe in him or disbelieve him. Now, to refuse to believe him is to make him a liar, and to make him a liar is virtually to slay the Lord of truth. His blood must be on you by faith to cleanse you, or else it will lie on you to condemn you, as it did the Jews of old.

What was the reason why these husbandmen, these dressers of the vineyard, dared thus to treat the heir? The reason is one which presses upon those here present who have rejected Christ. They did it, first, because *they had enjoyed a long immunity from punishment.* They had not been at once punished for their defiance of their lord. They had rejected his messengers without provoking him to war; they had gone on to stone and slay others of his servants, and the householder had

not come upon them to overthrow them. The first time they mocked at the messenger they were somewhat afraid; they feared lest soon the sword of the prince whom they had defied would threaten their gates. But as there was no invasion they grew bold. The next messenger they slew, and washed their hands, in presumption, saying, "Nothing will come of it." They grew at last to be very hardened. I know not what they said, but I conceive that certain of them propagated the theory that their lord took no notice of what they did, or that he was too loving to punish them severely. "See!" said they, "he only sends fresh messengers if we kill the old ones; and even if we kill his son he will bear it. Let us not imagine that he will take vengeance. He is love, and even should we murder his son, he will lay up in store for us a larger hope." "At any rate," they seemed to say, "we will run all risks. We will test his graciousness. We will kill his son, and so challenge him to do his worst."

Ungrateful men abuse God's long-suffering to-day as they did of old. They say, "Well, I have refused the gospel a long time; I have put aside many appeals; but I am not dead, nor struck with blindness, nor smitten down with a stroke. I can go on at least a little longer in safety. I may refuse Christ yet again, for God is merciful." "Certain teachers," say you, "tell us that God is so good, that if we even kill his Son he will take no account of it. We will kill his Son, and so we will reject the atonement, and trample on the precious blood, and yet we doubt not all will come right in the long run, and the evil of our crime will prove to be only temporary." You do not put your thoughts into those words; but you are saying as much by your actions. You dare not *say* it, and yet it lurks in your hearts, and works itself out in your deeds. You are going to run the dreadful risk of trifling with the Son of God. To you this seems a little thing, but horror takes hold of me at the thought of it. O sirs, I will be no partner in your crime. I will not cease to warn you that it must be of all risks the most tremendous. Gracious as he is—and God has proved his grace by sending his Son—yet God is not effeminate nor unjust. If you refuse the mercy which he so freely proffers you, he will deal with you in his justice. He is the Judge of all the earth, and he must do right. Remember how he puts it: "My sword shall be bathed in heaven." "If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies" (Deut. xxxii. 41). For as truly as he is love, so truly is he holiness. He is wondrous in his power to forgive; but he is also terrible out of his holy places. "If the sinner turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready." "Beware, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

The great reason, however, why these husbandmen determined to kill the heir was this: they said, "*Then the inheritance shall be ours.*" This is what the heart of man vainly desires. It says, "Let us be rid of this troublesome talk of religion, and then we can live for ourselves, and study our own pleasure without remorse of conscience. Are we not our own? Who shall be lord over us? If we are rid of this Jesus, we shall not have this claim being always made upon us, that we are God's creatures, and that we ought to live to him. We do not intend to serve

God. We will pay no rent to this householder. We will be our own proprietors. God shall have nothing from us. Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice? If we can get rid of this Christ business we can live as we list, and do as we please, and no one will call us to account. If we can persuade ourselves that religion is not true, we shall then care nothing for checks and warnings, but we shall take our full swing and enjoy ourselves without stint. A short life and a merry one will suit us. We might enjoy ourselves if this matter of God, and Christ, and eternity, could be disposed of." Yes, young man, this is what your prototype thought when he said to his father, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." Then he gathered all together, and went into a far country, and spent his "substance in riotous living. This is what you hanker after. But your folly is exceeding great. I grieve as I look into your young face and read the idle dream of your heart. You little know what a tyrant he serves who lives as he lists. May God grant that I may never live as my sinful lusts would make me live! I had rather be a machine and be compelled to do always what is right, than have free will, and with that free will give myself up to do that which is wrong. But there is no need to be made into a machine; the grace of God can make you as free in holiness as in sin. Grace can make you more free in the service of God than in the service of yourself.

Self lies at the bottom of all rejection of Christ—"Let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." Ah, my hearer! it will not be yours; and if it were yours for a little while, and you could do just as you pleased with it, yet remember that the inheritance which is so gained will soon pass away, and you yourself will soon have to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be bad. And what will *you* do who have slain your Saviour? What will you do in that day, who have lived and died unsaved?

III. I must close with that third head, which is so dreadful to me: THE APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT. I do not suppose that the thought of this subject will be half so dreadful to anybody here who is unconverted as it is to me. I tremble as I meditate upon the wrath to come. How glad I would be if I had not to preach from such a theme! But I must preach from it, or be a traitor to God, and an enemy to you. If you perish, your blood will be required at my hands, if I do not warn you of the punishment of sin. This is how the Saviour put it: "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?" He leaves our conscience to award the penalty. He leaves our imagination to prescribe a doom sufficient for a crime so base, so daring, so cruel. They have killed the only son of their lord, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

Here I must interject a terrible passage, which it burdens me to deliver. At this present moment I am afraid that this parable is being written out again in the history of the Church of God. God has put into his vineyard, or allowed to come into his vineyard, a number of religious teachers who are not rendering to him the honour due. Those religious teachers to whom I refer are not teaching the gospel as it is delivered in Holy Scripture, but they are adapting it to the age,

and to the scientific knowledge of the period. They are described in the book of the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. They say still unto them that despise me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you." The thoughts of their own minds are given instead of the revelation of God. Thus they set up another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you. My fear is that the Lord will not much longer bear with these husbandmen. He will not long bear these "prophets of the deceit of their own hearts." He will bring an everlasting reproach upon them, and cut them off in his anger. He will destroy those wicked men, and he will give his vineyard unto other husbandmen, who will deal more faithfully with the souls of men. I feel in my own soul that it must be so. I dare not live as a preacher of my own inventions. I dare not die as a preacher of my own thoughts, or of the thoughts of other men. I must tell my Master's message or be accursed. The spirit of the age is the spirit of proud self-sufficiency; be it ours to sit at Jesus' feet. My Lord will one day say to me, "I gave thee a message, didst thou deliver it? I bade thee speak in my name, didst thou speak my words or thine own? I gave thee a revelation, didst thou deliver that revelation as best thou couldst? or didst thou invent a new thing out of thine own brain?" I know how I shall answer. I fear that a terrible doom awaits those who go after the fashionable falsehoods of the day. Be they clergymen or dissenting ministers, an unutterably horrible damnation from the right hand of God awaits those who prostitute the office of the ministry for the delivery of human philosophies instead of teaching the gospel of the blessed God. Brethren, beware that none of us sin against the Holy Ghost by setting up our dreams in rivalry with his certainties. Pray for those who do so, lest God deal with them speedily in vengeance. The Lord have mercy upon all false prophets, and bring them humbly and tremblingly to his feet, lest they ensnare the people yet more, to the overthrow of this nation, and the taking away of the candlestick out of its place.

I return to you whom I have already addressed. You have crucified the Son of God by refusing to believe in him. What shall the Lord do unto you when he comes? The sentence cannot be too severe, for the crime is beyond measure horrible. It must be the highest form of punishment known to the law. They slew the servants, and they slew the heir; no temporary punishment can meet the case. Those who plead for a light doom for such a crime must, in their own hearts, be rebels. Those who are evermore making light of hell are probably doing it in the hope of making it easy for themselves. He is the devil's advocate who would judge the punishment of the impenitent to be a light one; God's true servants say, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Our Lord leaves our own consciences to depict the overwhelming misery of those miserable men who carry their rebellion to its full length.

In the chapter which we read (Matthew xxi.), our Lord gives us a

terrible word. Comparing himself to the stone which should be the foundation, but which the builders reject, he says, "On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Sinner, if you reject the Saviour, you will have to feel his full weight. Boundless in power, infinite in majesty, *the whole weight of him will fall on you.* Will you think that over? Since he breaks the nations in pieces with a rod of iron, judge ye his power; since from his presence heaven and earth flee away, judge ye his power. But whatever that power may be, you will have to feel the full force of it. This foundation stone falling upon you shall grind you to powder. I will not dwell further upon this tremendous thought, but I will repeat it in set and solemn form: the full weight of the incarnate God, in the day of his wrath, you will have to bear. It is put in another way in that expression—"The wrath of the Lamb." Is not that a marvellous combination, "The wrath of the Lamb"? Love when it turns to jealousy is the fiercest of all passions; and when the love of Christ in infinite justice shall be turned into holy indignation against unrighteousness, then it will be something terrible to think of, and to bear it will be the second death. Are you prepared to bear the awful weight of a Saviour's anger? No: you are not. Come, then, to Jesus. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, while his wrath is kindled but a little." O my hearers, my dear hearers, do not refuse the Lord Jesus, who now pleads with you. I am not worthy to be his ambassador; I am not fit for the office; but yet I would plead with you as a loving brother. Will you lose your souls? Will you reject Christ? O sirs, will you refuse the Son of God? Men and women, can you be so mad as to live and die without the Saviour? Are you so far gone as this? Turn, I beseech you, turn you this day. Lord, turn them, for thy dear Son's sake! Amen.